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THE PROPHETS AND KINGS

OF

THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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THE PROPHETS AND KINGS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

A SERIES OF SERMONS PREACHED IN THE CHAPEL OF LINCOLN'S INN,

BY FREDERICK DENISON MAURICE,

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TO

THOMAS ERSKINE, Esq., of Linlathen.

My dear Mr. Erskine: —

The pleasure of associating my name with yours, and the kind interest which you expressed in some of these sermons when you heard them preached, might not be a sufficient excuse for the liberty which I take in dedicating them to you. But I have a much stronger reason. I am under obligations to you which the subject of this volume especially brings to my mind, and which other motives beside personal gratitude urge me to acknowledge.

I owe it to you that I am able to honor and to appreciate one part of the testimony which was borne by those Scotchmen in the seventeenth century, whom we of the English Church are apt to regard with great dislike. I owe it to you that another part of their doctrine, which is often confounded with that testimony, and which, I fear, in the minds of a number of their descendants has survived it altogether, appears to me much more perilous and terrible than it does to many of those who are in the habit of denouncing them. Their proclamation that God Himself is the King, the Lawgiver, the Judge of a nation; that His government over the Jews was not a more actual government than that which He exercised over Scotland; that His Will is the only source and ground of right will and right acts in His creatures; — this is a proclamation which, whatever form it may have taken, against whatever persons or institutions it may have been directed, whatever may have been the immediate or apparent results of putting it forward, I cannot but accept as true, beneficent, divine. If the Episcopalian Churchmen and Statesmen of England and Scotland had fully and heartily recognized it, I do not believe that any power on earth could have shaken their hierarchy. Because they were not possessed with the truth of it, I thank God that they were not permitted to uphold what I nevertheless believe that He established and that He raised again.

But those who spoke of God as a real King, and who affirmed that a nation stood by virtue of its covenant with Him, used phrases respecting His sovereignty which, it seems to me, were destructive of the very principle for which they were contending, which justified any evil acts they might find necessary for their purpose, which were pregnant with mischief to after generations. All that there was of strength and nobleness in these men arose out of the belief that the God of the Jews and of them was a God of righteousness and truth, and that whatever was unrighteous and untrue must sooner or later shrink and shrivel at His word. Alas! how easily did the idea of a Being who can decree what He pleases, — who can make right wrong and wrong right by choosing it, — who may outrage the conscience in man which He has created to bear witness of what He is, and of what man, His image, is intended to be, — mingle itself with a faith so contradictory of it! How easily in an age of energy and action could the bravest deeds, the most passionate devotion to a cause, blend with cruel judgments and fanatical exclusiveness, which hide the good from one set of party historians, and are glorified by it in the eyes of another! But how much more easily, when the age of action and energy has passed away, and an age of speculation has begun, does the theory of a Will which arranges Punishment, Satisfaction, Salvation, according to its pleasure, of a Justice which means only the demand for vengeance, of a Mercy which means only the exemption of certain persons from that demand, take the place of belief in a God who so loves the world as to give His Son for it! How easily do those records, wherein Puritan divinity is so rich, of souls struggling with the Spirit of Evil and taking refuge from his suggestions, and from their own weakness and despair, in a Love of which they could not sound the depths, and to which no external acts or internal feelings of theirs could the least entitle them, — records full of truth and living power, however sense and spirit, physical disease and torments of the conscience, may sometimes be confounded in them, — adjust themselves to a system which attributes the acts and purposes of the Tempter and Destroyer to the Father of Lights!

I know well how much there is and always has been in the roughest, hardest Calvinism which fights against these conclusions and practically triumphs over them. God forbid that I should hold any human being tied to them by any logical necessity, that I should not welcome his indignant repudiation of them, that I should not thank him for calling me a maligner, and for affirming that nothing like what I have set down is the faith of him or of his fathers. But I do know also, and you know, that thousands of men and women, in your land and in ours, regard this as the only consistent explanation of the dogmas which they have been taught, of that which they suppose to be the teaching of the Bible. They think that we are practising a cheat upon ourselves, that we are using some mystical artifices to evade plain texts and literal history, if we profess to hold by the Scriptures and yet not to adopt this view of the Divine sovereignty. We may hide it from ourselves as we will, we may cast the burden upon whom we will, but this is the cause which is driving our sons to infidelity and our daughters to Rome. The spectre from which they are flying is a God whom they cannot trust and cannot love. We may try to cure symptoms by producing evidences of Christianity, or by exposing superstition. But we shall find that we have not reached the root of the disease, and that it will always be appearing in new forms. Have we a Gospel for men, for all men? Is it a Gospel that God's will is a will to all Good, a will to deliver them from all Evil? Is it a Gospel that He has reconciled the world unto Himself? Is it this absolutely, or this with a multitude of reservations, explanations, contradictions? Such questions must be asked by those who are desirous of restoring faith among the upper and middle classes, or of lifting the lower out of the pit into which we have allowed them to sink. If they cannot be answered, the gentler and feminine spirits will try what help they can get from the Pope; the speculative will become Pantheists; the people will become Atheists.

It is more than twenty years since a book of yours brought home to my mind the conviction that no Gospel but this can be of any use to the world, and that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is such a one. From that time I ceased to wish for refined explanations of the Catholic Creeds. They became to me the clearest explanations I could find of man's relation to God, the fullest declaration of that Name which I felt that all creatures were desiring to know. I ceased, also, to desire refined explanations of the Four Gospels and the Epistles. The first, taken as they stand, declare, it seems to me, the existence of a Kingdom of Heaven which is near us all. The last show how that Kingdom of Heaven established itself on this earth of ours, — Churches of Jews and Gentiles being called out as witnesses of it, and the Jewish nation perishing that it might be revealed in its fulness and unity as the ground of modern Society. In proportion as I grew strong in this conviction, I became more deeply thankful for the testimony which Protestantism has borne for the truth that the Universal Church stands only on Christ, and that a perfect Sacrifice has been offered and accepted once for all. At the same time, I have felt a strong sympathy with those who say that Protestants do not recognize, as they ought, in their thoughts and in their worship, the truth that all prayer is grounded on that finished sacrifice, and that it becomes an irreverent effort to change the Divine Will, not an earnest entreaty that it may be done on earth as it is in heaven, — the expression of divided, contradictory, individual wishes, not the utterance of a body the distinct members of which are possessed with one Spirit, — when it loses its connection with Sacrifice, or when any other notion of Sacrifice is substituted for that of a Son yielding Himself to a Father in whom He delights.

These thoughts have reference chiefly to the New Testament. But the conviction has been fixing itself deeply in my mind, that the Old Testament too ought to be read much more simply and according to the letter than we are used to read it; that we have not made its application to our individual cases more clear by overlooking its obvious national characteristics; that if we had given heed to them we should have found an interpretation of some of the greatest difficulties in history and in the condition of the world around us. This opinion is strangely opposed to that which is common among the philosophical thinkers of our day. It sets me in direct opposition to those writers, in this country and America, who make it their business to copy German models, though it does not authorize me to refuse any help from German learning when it comes within my reach, or to pronounce sentence upon a nation with which I am most imperfectly acquainted, or to generalize under one name Theologians who I suppose exhibit as many varieties of opinion, and are scattered through as many schools, as our own.

Many of my conclusions may differ widely from those into which you have been led: I should be grieved to make you responsible for them. But if I have tried in these Sermons to show that the story of the Prophets and Kings of the Old Testament is as directly applicable to the modern world as any Covenanter ever dreamed, — but that it is applicable, because it is a continual witness for a God of Righteousness, not only against idolatry, but against that notion of a mere Sovereign Baal or Bel which underlies all idolatry, all tyranny, all immorality, — I may claim you as their spiritual progenitor. You will see that they do bear a witness, though a feeble one, for a truth upon the acknowledgment of which I believe the well-being of your land, and of ours, and of the whole Church, depends. You will pray that more courageous and faithful champions of it may be raised up. How many will desire that you may be preserved to show to them, by an evidence mightier than words, that there is a Spirit of Love working in the hearts of human beings, and that the lives of those who submit to it are illuminated and transfigured by it!

Believe me, my dear friend,

Ever gratefully and affectionately yours,

F. D. MAURICE.

London, *November* 11*th*, 1852.

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SERMON I.

THE NEW PERIOD IN JEWISH HISTORY.

Lincoln's Inn, 22d Sunday after Trinity. — Nov. 1, 1851.

> Then all the Elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel unto Ramah; and said unto him, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. And the Lord said unto Samuel, "Hearken to the voice of the people in all they say unto thee, for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them." — 1 Samuel viii. 4–8.

The titles of this and the next book in our canon are either the First and Second Books of Samuel or the First and Second Books of Kings. The propriety of the latter name is obvious. We are entering upon the history of the Hebrew kings; we are told by what steps the age of the judges passed into theirs. But how should Samuel, whose death is recorded before the end of the first of these books, who ceases to be the most conspicuous person in it after he has anointed Saul, have succeeded in stamping such an image of himself upon the narrative? He is not the composer of the record; there are no lengthened prophecies of his introduced into it. We have a very clear picture of him, certainly, in infancy, boyhood, manhood, and old age. But there are many biographies equally distinct; yet the subjects of them have not possessed this dignity; they have not given their names to any portion of the history.

I apprehend that this fact indicates a consciousness among the Jews, that the age of the kings would be also the age of the prophets. It could not, they felt, be contemplated in one light, without being contemplated in the other. On all occasions the prophet would be beside the king to reprove, direct, and encourage him. On all occasions the prophet's office would be to show what the office of the king was, how it might be neglected and violated, how it might be faithfully executed, how the full significance of it would at last be brought out and actually embodied. The Book of Kings therefore is the Book of Samuel, not merely because the individual man was the last of the judges, and poured the anointing oil upon the first two of the kings, but because he represented in his own person a power and a position which were quite different from theirs, and yet which could not be rightly understood apart from theirs.

When we first meet with Samuel, he appears as the reprover of an aged priest. Eli was not insensible to the greatness of his vocation. But his dignity was an hereditary one, and the subordinate priests were members of his family. His sons had become utterly corrupt and abominable. He had failed to preserve a seed which could feel, and make their countrymen feel, that the service of the God of Israel was a reality and not a fiction. Eli's faith was all his own; it brought no one within its circle; it created no atmosphere about itself. In a deeper sense than the most literal and obvious one, the lamp was waxing dim in the ark of the Lord. No one was keeping the flame of it alive. The people felt as if it were all but quenched already. The boy Samuel was raised up to tell them that it would soon be more evidently extinct than it was then, but that it would be found to be fed from a hidden source, to be kept alive by another than Eli or his sons. The preservation of the ark and the sacrifices, of the most inward substance of the Jewish commonwealth, would be seen to depend, not upon a succession in the family of Aaron, but upon Him who had ordered the succession, upon Him who was, and is, and is to come.

Thus Samuel, because he had been called to be a prophet, and was proved to be one by signs which all men from Dan to Beersheba could recognize, was a witness that an hereditary priesthood derives all its worth from a divine presence which is not shut up in it or limited by it; and that without that presence it means nothing and is nothing, nay, becomes worse than nothing, a plague and cancer in the society, poisoning its very heart, spreading disease and death through it. His message was first to the priest himself; then to the nation concerning the priest. For the priest was as yet *the* hereditary functionary in the commonwealth. He was the only person who *could* turn duties into mere routine, who *could* make his authority and his reputation a plea for setting up the worship of false gods instead of the worship of the living and true God, vile orgies instead of the services of the holy place wherein the Most High was dwelling. The judge had no power to do this kind of mischief. He appeared when an emergency demanded his presence. He might do a number of irregular, turbulent, anarchical acts; he might pass from a deliverer and defender of boundaries into a tyrant. But his power died with him. There were several attempts to perpetuate it, as, for instance, in the family of Gideon. An illegitimate child of that family tried to make himself a king; but the conscience of the better Israelites was against the experiment. The disorders and jealousies of their tribes were equally against it. It was as unnatural and impossible for them all to confess one permanent head, or to allow him to transmit his powers to others, as it was natural for them to receive and follow a great champion when he proved that he could subdue their enemies and govern them. These champions judged them, made them understand that there was a law over them which they must obey, reclaimed them for a little while from their wild and reckless habits, their slavish and brutal idolatries. Then the settled order of the priesthood gave them some feeling of unity as a nation, reminded them that an unseen God had called them to be his people. Presently the old factions appeared again. Some Levite went off with a particular family, became its priest, introduced or ratified some domestic idolatry. There would be new tribe wars, fresh attacks from their neighbors round about them, more of feebleness and more of slavery.

The signal downfall of the nation which took place in Samuel's day, when the ark, the symbol of the people's unity, was captured by the Philistines, prepared the way for a great change in all these respects. Samuel became a judge in a different sense from his predecessors. He was not a mere warrior or hero raised up to put down a particular foe. He was the restorer of the whole land, one who brought the different parts of it into connection with each other, who made them feel the blessings of a common organization, the necessity and the happiness of being subject to government, the misery of a condition of things in which each man did that which was right in his own eyes. It would appear that the Jews had never, since they came into the promised land, experienced so orderly and righteous a civil government as during the time in which Samuel ruled them. I say *civil* government, for such it evidently was. Samuel was in the strictest sense a Judge. Whatever other functions he had, this was one by which he was chiefly and most distinctively recognized. It is clear from the story of his dedication by Hannah that he was a priest, and that circumstance is of considerable importance in some of his relations with Saul; but the comparative sinking of that part of his character, the incidental manner in which it is brought out, make us aware how much more prominent the other side of the commonwealth at this time was, how much the legal, judicial, governing element was for the present overshadowing the purely sacrificial. But if it should be supposed for a moment that Samuel was a less devout man because his acts were more of a civil than of a sacerdotal kind, every word in the history will refute the notion. The ark of God had never been so precious to any earlier Israelite as it was to him who lived when it was captured and brought back again. God, as a living ruler and king, was present to him in all his thoughts and acts. He existed only to bring home His righteous rule to the minds and hearts of his countrymen. We must understand how much this was the absorbing purpose of his mind, if we would trace what passed in it when the Elders of Israel came to him with the request, "Make us a king."

Such a request I said just now could scarcely have been made, or at least could not have been the expression of the mind of any great body of the people, in the previous age. But Samuel's reformation had awakened in them a sense of order to which they had been strangers before. The words "Elders of Israel" themselves show how much had been done to revive the institutions of Moses, to call out the family and tribe sympathies which were at the root of those institutions, and to make them ministers of union, not, as they had been, of division. So strongly had this family feeling been awakened, that Samuel's sons, it seems from the next passage, had, without any formal election or designation, performed some of the functions of their father. A tendency to hereditary succession was unfolding itself in the mind of the people, and was connecting itself directly with the civil, as it had before been connected with the ecclesiastical, forms of the commonwealth. But Samuel's sons did not walk in his ways. They were self-seekers; they were suspected of taking bribes. The effect of this distrust was just that which proceeds in all ages from the same cause, — dissatisfaction, a cry for change, a feeling that the fault of the person who administers implies some evil or defect in that which he has to administer. But the change which these elders craved for was not a greater independence of authority. They had a sense of wanting authority. The degeneracy of Samuel's sons did not, as we might have fancied, make them suspicious of a ruler who should establish a family. It only made them long for a different sort of rule, for one which should be less irregular and fluctuating. They were not like the nations round about; they seemed to be at a manifest disadvantage when they fought with them; they had no regular leader of their armies, no one who could set them in array and go forth at the head of them. It is evident from another passage, in which it is said that they desired a king because Nahash the king of Ammon was coming out against them, that this was their uppermost thought. A king signified to them little more than a general. There was something else in their minds than this; something at least was implied in this, which was deeper than the rude craving for a man in a target of brass and with a spear like a weaver's beam. The discipline and the coherency of an army have a charm which the inmost spirit recognizes, and which could not exist if it was without a directing head.

But the thing displeased Samuel, and he cried unto the Lord. Why did it displease him? Men who think themselves very clever have answered, "Of course, because he was seeking to aggrandize his own family. He had a cunning plan of advancing his sons which this new proposition would defeat." It is not necessary to confute such a notion by proclaiming that the characters in Scripture are different from other characters. It is quite enough to say, that if such a character as Samuel's were met with in any history whatever, this would be a low, paltry, vulgar way of accounting for his acts. He had all his life been possessed with one great conviction, that the righteous God was King of the land. In His name and in His strength, he had been putting down wrong and asserting right. He had taken no man's ass and had handled no bribes, had sought for truth in his inward parts, and had striven to speak and act the truth outwardly. To suppose that he had been plotting all his days for those miserable objects which have made popes execrable and have overthrown the kingdoms of modern dynasts, is to confound all distinctions, to make the records of humanity merely the records of the pettinesses and crimes which have destroyed it. If Samuel was conscious of any such desire in his heart, — and it may doubtless have been there, as any, even the vilest desire may be working in him who abhors it most, — he would indeed have cried to the Lord to deliver him from such godlessness, and his nation from the effects of it. He did cry to the Lord because the thing displeased him, because he had a sense that there was something very wrong in the wish which his countrymen were cherishing; perhaps — and such a feeling was not wrong, though wrong might be very near it — because he discovered in them much ingratitude to himself; because he thought his government was better than any they would substitute for it; because he did not believe, or tried not to believe, the ills which were imputed to his sons. All these were good reasons for praying to the Lord; for a man does that with very little fervency if he is quite clear about his own conclusions, if he sees his way and is in no sort of embarrassment or perplexity. It is a sense of dimness and confusion which drives us to the source of light. We do not know what we ought to think about this thing or that, and we want to be told what we should think about it; we want to have our displeasure deepened if it is right, and taken away if it is wrong; or if, as most often happens, it is partly right and partly wrong, that the good should be separated from the evil, the first reinforced with God's own might, the other utterly cast out. In such a state of mind, I apprehend, Samuel prayed unto the Lord, or else into such a state of mind he came while he was praying. And so his prayers led to an honest practical result, a result to which the displeasure without the prayer would certainly not have brought him.

"And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee; for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them." Such an answer sounds at first most strange, most perplexing! Hearken unto them, — *for* they have rejected Me. Yield to them, because they are doing a worse thing than you supposed they were doing. Let them have their way, seeing that they are not changing a mere form of government, but breaking loose from the principle upon which their nation has stood from its foundation. No contradiction can seem greater. And yet no Jewish statesman or prophet could do the work that was given him to do, could be God's faithful witness, if he did not enter into the very heart of this contradiction, if he did not mould his own conduct according to the deep truth which was implied in it. His impulse was to maintain the order of things which he found established in his day. He believed that order was God's order; he dared not refer it to any lower source. He administered that order in this faith; if it forsook him he became careless and corrupt. Could God's order then be changed? Was He not, by His very nature, the Unchangeable? Was it not the highest duty to make the people feel that this was His character? Was it not thus that their own frivolity and passion for change would be corrected? When the impulse passes into reasoning you cannot easily detect a flaw in it; and yet it was stronger still while it remained an impulse and did not pass into reasoning. Nothing but prayer to the unchangeable God could show wherein both were false and might lead to falsehood. The unchangeableness of God is not to be confounded with the rigidness of a rule or a system. If it is so confounded the purpose and nature of His government are forgotten. He — the Perfect and Absolute Will — has created beings with wills, beings made in His own image. He educates them; He desires that they should know His will, that is to say Himself. They are to learn what they themselves are, what they would make of themselves, what He would make of them, partly by an experience of the effects of their own wilfulness, partly by the results which He brings to pass in spite of that wilfulness, nay, by means of it. This is the explanation of the paradox. "Hearken unto them, for they have not rejected thee, but Me." If this was a personal question, if the wish of the people was one which you might regard merely as an offence to *you*, there would be a pretext for fighting with them, and insisting upon their surrendering themselves to your judgment. But if you take a more accurate measure of their wrong, if you feel it to be an act of unbelief in My unseen government, and a desire to substitute a visible for an invisible ruler, you will not think you can deal with such perverseness by any petty scheme of yours, by a mere adherence to existing forms. The evil requires a far deeper and more radical treatment; the people must be taught that they have an unseen ruler, and cannot live or act without one. The preservation of you as a judge, the preservation of the system of government by judges, would be no such lesson. It would only be a question between one kind of outward rule and another; you would be attaching the same kind of false and dangerous importance to the ancient scheme which they attach to the novel one. There is nothing strange in this desire of theirs. "According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even unto this day wherewith they have forsaken Me and served other gods, so do they now unto thee." The same idolatrous tendency, the same unbelief in an invisible government, has been in them throughout. With that tendency have I been striving by a series of wonderful, orderly methods; you experience the bitterness of it now. Believe that this is part of your privilege as My servant, to encounter the same kind of opposition which I encounter from the self-will of men; to understand what My heart towards them is through your own. And therefore tell them what manner of a king will reign over them. Tell them that he will take their sons for his chariots and to be his horsemen, and their daughters to be confectioners and cooks; and that their fields and their olive-yards and their vineyards he will give to his servants. Let them know what the general of armies whom they crave for as a deliverer will do to bring them into bondage; but do not resist a desire which has a deeper meaning in it than you know, which will produce immediate sorrows, but in which is hidden a divine purpose for the good and not the destruction of your people.

In a very remarkable sense, then, the *vox populi* was the *vox Dei*, even when the two voices seemed most utterly out of harmony. The prophet was not merely to notice the outward and obvious discord between them; he was to listen with purged ears till he found where one became really the echo of the other.

The Jews were asking for heavy punishments which they needed; without which the evil that was in them could not have been brought to light or cured. But they were asking also for something besides punishment, for that in which lay the seeds of the highest blessing. The king to lead their armies, the new military ruler who would make them like the nations round about them, would bring upon them all the plagues of which Samuel was commanded to warn them. He would do worse things for them than make their daughters confectioners, or than take their fields and olive-yards for his servants. He would cultivate all their most idolatrous tendencies, and would give *them* the freest scope while he crushed and enslaved all that was better and nobler in them. But beneath this dark counterfeit image was hidden the image of a true king reigning in righteousness, the assertor of truth, order, unity in the land, the helper of the poor, who would not judge after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears, but would smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips would slay the wicked.

Such true kings, kings after His own heart, God would in due time bring forth. Such kings, instead of intercepting the rays of His light, instead of putting themselves in place of Him, would continually remind their subjects of His presence, would impart to them a sense of divine government which they had never possessed before, would make them understand that a true divine government must also be a true human government, that man is made in the image of God, that the heavenly offices are represented in the earthly. And though such kings might leave sons more utterly unlike them than Samuel's sons were to himself, yet this degeneracy would not prove that the desire for a family succession was a false one, that it did not answer to a deep want in the heart of man which God designed to satisfy. The belief in a race reigning by covenant with God, would give to the people a sense of the continuity of their nation, of the sacred and intimate relation between one age of it and another, of that relation being interwoven with and inseparable from the family relation, which would be an abundant compensation for the depravities and misdoings of particular sovereigns, nay, which would convert those depravities and misdoings into arguments and evidences of God's abiding and eternal dominion.

Samuel could see little of these good things, which lay hidden in the womb of time, to be brought forth in their appointed season. He could only walk in the dark by faith, not sight, slowly coming to understand so much of the divine precept as enabled him to obey it. His after life is full of melancholy yet consolatory instruction. He goes into obscurity as a good man should, when he feels that his main work is done. He comes forth whenever there is need for him, showing that the power which he once possessed is as real as ever, though it has another and safer dwelling than with the temporary and earthly steward of it. His last years are years of sorrow. The king whom he has anointed has too faithfully fulfilled all his fears and prognostics. Yet there lies in the dim distance the hope of one, then a fugitive and an outlaw, who might become a true shepherd of the people, the author of a progeny which should rule and bless the nations.

But as I intimated at the beginning of this sermon, the meaning of his life is not exhausted in himself. He too is to be the beginner of a race, though not of one which is to be propagated like that of the kings. It was a race which would include like the other a number of evil and degenerate children, who would turn their gifts to worse uses, who would more directly blaspheme the source of their gifts, than the civil rulers were able to do. There is no charm in any ordinanec whatever, in the succession of son to father, or of pupil to teacher, to prevent such results as these. If there were, we should fall down and worship institutions and arrangements, instead of worshipping God. He pours contempt upon the best devices, upon those which bear most the stamp of His own wisdom, when they exalt themselves against Him. The wise father has not to shed more bitter tears over the foolish son, than the godly self-sacrificing teacher has over the disciple who turns his truest words into falsehoods, his most faithful acts into excuses for sin. But under the guidance of a living God, the seed of the prophets became the blessed counteractor of the evil, the interpreter of the good which was to come from the seed of the kings. As the first of them trampled upon the hereditary charm of the priesthood that he might assert the glory of Him who had appointed the priests, so his successors were to break through the hereditary charm and tradition of royalty, that they might declare that covenant which was the foundation of royalty, the Giver of the covenant from whom royalty derived its primary sanction, His continual claim upon the obedience of His subjects. This work was never to become extinct, till it had obtained its perfect fulfilment, — no, not to become extinct then, for the revelation of a perfect Prophet, a perfect Priest, a perfect King, would be but the commencement of a new and universal society, grounded upon the fact of His appearance, as all previous society had been upon the belief of His reality and the hope of His manifestation.

How prophets and kings accomplished their respective missions, how each explained the mission of the other, how much was learned by their errors and imperfections because there was a higher ruler and teacher than either, I may, if God permit, consider in future sermons. We may find that the great ultimate objects which the divine ministers were to keep in sight do not in the least prevent them from suggesting to us innumerable hints and discovering the deepest principles for our guidance in the commonest transactions of our lives. The more earnestly we desire to understand God's ways to us, and how we may walk in His ways, the more light will these records afford us.

One glimpse of such light, I think, you may have obtained from the subject which has occupied us this afternoon. You may have seen how possible it is in our dealings with our fellow-creatures to fight too obstinately with their wilfulness, *because* we do not thoroughly appreciate the evil of it. We fancy that we can resist it by strengthening certain mud banks which had a real worth when they were formed, but which were intended for a purpose that has been fulfilled. If we saw how mighty the flood was, what it was likely to sweep away, we should feel that we needed some diviner and more permanent defence. That we may bring forth deep and eternal principles into fuller manifestation, we should not scruple to concede that for which we have a strong personal affection; we should acknowledge that the sins of rulers must lead to changes we cannot contemplate without fear; we should even adopt names and titles of which we have a reasonable dread. Our best maxims, our dearest heirlooms, are worthless and dead if they do not bear witness of the Living God. He may sanctify and consecrate that which seems most opposed to them. This lesson I think is one of frequent and various application in our individual and national experience. There is another still more precious, that we should never despair when a people appears to be most bent on mischief, — not even when all powers, civil and spiritual, are conspiring with it. Samuel had, more than once or twice in his life, an excuse for thinking that all these influences were leading to the ruin of his land. Yet deliverance came through the very acts which these evils made necessary.

And this was one of a series of instances in which self-will was found to serve the purposes of a high and gracious Will. The last of that series explained the meaning of all that went before. " Of a truth, Lord," said the little band of disciples who were gathered in the upper room of Jerusalem, — " Of a truth, Lord, against thy holy child Jesus were gathered together both Herod and Pontius Pilate, and all the people of the Jews; to do what thy hand and thy counsel had prepared before to be done." O that while we lay to heart this consolation we may also join in the prayer which followed it! "And now, Lord, grant that thy servants may with all boldness speak thy word, and that signs and wonders may be done in the name of thy holy child Jesus."

SERMON II.

THE LIFE OF SAUL.

LINCOLN'S INN, 23D SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY. — NOV. 23, 1851.

Wherefore they say, "Is Saul also among the Prophets?" — 1 SAMUEL xix. 24.

THIS question, which became proverbial, is referred in the Book of Samuel to two different incidents in the life of Saul. He is said to have met a troop of prophets before he was chosen king, when he was known only as the son of Kish the Benjamite, and to have been suddenly seized with their spirit. He is said in the latter and degenerate period of his reign, when he was persecuting David, to have gone down to Ramah, in search of his son-in-law, "and the Spirit of God came on him and he went on and prophesied until he came to Naioth in Ramah." It is the fashion of our times to suppose that these must be two versions of the same fact preserved by different chroniclers, and brought together by some careless compiler. I venture to think that that solution of the difficulty is not a necessary one, not even the most probable one. I believe that there occur in most of our lives events, often separated by many years, which look as if one was the repetition of the other. I fancy that those who reflect, may discover in such recurring incidents very striking, often very sad, memorials of what they have been and of what they are; very awful witnesses of their own identity, amidst all the changes that have befallen them, and the more terrible changes that have taken place within them. As it sometimes assists a man's meditations to walk amongst the same trees under the shade of which he walked, or to watch the sea from the same point from which he watched it, twenty or thirty years before; so these startling revivals of past experiences, these relapses into states of feeling that have been unknown for a long season, must be more powerful revelations to him respecting the unity of the past and present in his inward history. And, if so, a faithful biographer will be careful to record such pairs of events. He will find them especially useful in making the life of his hero intelligible. They will give his reader, though he may not know why, a sense that he is meeting with an actual man, not merely with a man in a book.

We shall understand better how this observation applies to Saul's history, if we trace it as it is delivered in the Bible. There is a way of presenting what is called the rationale of the Bible narratives, stripping them of their mystical and theological adjuncts, which I do not profess to follow. If I did, I should have to tell you that Saul was chosen by the people of Israel, because he was the tallest and strongest man among them; that while the novelty of royalty lasted, he retained his popularity; that he lost it partly through the influence of the prophet Samuel, who feared that he was breaking loose from his influence and taking a course of his own, and who therefore represented him as having violated some of the duties which belonged to a theocratic sovereign; that a young and brilliant rival put forward by this venerated teacher supplanted him in the affection of his people and even of his own family; that jealousy at the admiration which was excited by this adventurer, and fear that he would actually obtain the kingdom, overthrew his reason; that he fell into wild, arbitrary, and desperate courses, provoked a war with the Philistines, and died in battle. It seems to some that the records of our book become vastly more real when they are put into this modern dress and made to look as if they had been taken out of a journal of the day. And I do not deny that such paraphrases may be an escape from the dryness and formality with which Scripture narratives are sometimes offered to us, as if they referred to beings of a different nature from our own; as if, because they speak of God, they have nothing to do with man. But I venture to doubt whether the phraseology of newspapers is after all the most real, the most human, the most historical; whether the conventional formulas which describe so readily and so satisfactorily to our minds the causes that produce popular or royal follies or perversities, do convey any distinct or living impressions to us; whether we must not render the modern dialect back into the ancient one from which we have translated it, before we can hope honestly to understand it, or to bring what passes among ourselves into comparison or correspondence with the history that is delivered in it.

For instance, it may be very true and very needful to remember that the height of Saul's stature and the comeliness of his person had much to do with his being made the first king of Israel. But if, instead of saying that the people elected him for this reason, we follow the Scripture narrative strictly, and say that he being a member of an insignificant family in the smallest tribe of Israel, and therefore being most unlikely to be selected by the people, and having no dream of any such honor for himself, was marked out by God as the person on whom He would bestow it,—I believe we shall obtain a light, not upon this fact only, but upon a multitude that have occurred in the history of the world, which stand in great need of explanation, and which are certainly not explained by the commonplaces of ordinary narrators, even if they call themselves philosophical. In a number of cases (the annals of every nation, and of almost every age, supply some) an inconceivably trifling incident, as trifling as that of Saul going out in search of his father's asses, has brought forth the man whom a people feel to be, not selected by them, but given to them; whom they adopt and embrace, they know not why; and who, whether or not he is able to guide and govern them, proves to be a faithful representative of their own state of mind, the very type and embodiment of that character and these habits of mind which they are themselves exhibiting. This is the fact. It has nothing to do with theories about who are or ought to be the choosers of a ruler, with the maxims which guide or should guide their choice of him. He is there; he comes to them. Whether you like it or not, you must refer, you do refer, his appearance to some invisible agency. You may call that agency Chance, if you like. If you know no other name, that is of course the one which you will resort to. If you are content with it, there is no more to be said. But mankind has not been content with it. Men have said, there must be an order in these events apparently so fortuitous. They have insisted upon knowing something about that order and who directs it. If now in this nineteenth century, this century of science, you choose to say, there is *no* order in all this,—your language at all events sounds as if you were retrograding, not progressing, as if you were falling back upon the crudest notions of barbarism. But if not, you may listen to the way in which the Scripture accounts for one of these instances, and in that one for all, whensoever and wheresoever they take place. He, it says, who governed the Israelites, who was their real king, had taught His judge and prophet that he was not to resist the craving of the people,—though it was a self-willed, idolatrous, mischievous craving,—to have a ruler of their armies who should make them like the nations round about; that he was to yield to them and let them have their way. And now, it is said, God appointed the king who would answer to the desires of this people, who was the kind of man that they had conceived of, cast in their own mould, distinguished from them chiefly by mere outward superiority, the very person who would cause them to experience that which it was absolutely necessary for them to experience. Scripture says that Samuel the prophet was taught to perceive that this was the man whom God had chosen for them; that he anointed him; and that he became their king accordingly.

We are not told any remarkable points in the character or early discipline of the man who was appointed to this office; there were probably none to tell. But as I have often had occasion to notice in the earlier Scripture narratives, a man not distinguished from his fellows by any peculiar gifts, merely a specimen of the ordinary, the most ordinary, human material, may nevertheless be brought most livingly before us; we may be compelled to feel that he is an individual man, one of ourselves, and simply as such to care for him.

We must read the story of Saul's journey in search of the asses; of his servant's advice to him about the prophet, "the honorable man, the man of God," whose words would surely come to pass, and who might tell them the way they should go; of the maidens coming down the hill to draw water, who told him how the people were gone up to the high place to a sacrifice, and how the seer would presently come to bless it; of the first meeting of the Benjamite with the holy man, and of the wonder with which he heard that a portion of the sacrifice was set apart for him, and that the desire of Israel was upon him and upon his father's house,—we must read this story oftentimes in order to understand how a few lines may bring a whole picture before us, and make us acquainted with what is passing in a region into which a mere picture cannot lead us. The historian does not talk about the subjects of his narrative, but shows them to us. All is, in the strictest sense of the word, dramatical. The men are made known to us in their doings, and we feel that there is a clear light falling upon them from above by which we are enabled to see them.

Then comes in that passage in the story of Saul to which I alluded before. It is thus foretold to him by Samuel. "When thou art departed from me to-day, thou shalt then find two men by Rachel's sepulchre, in the border of Benjamin at Zelzah. Then shalt thou go on forward from thence and thou shalt come to the plain of Tabor, and there shall meet thee three men going up to God to Bethel, one carrying three kids, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle of wine. And they will salute thee and give thee two loaves of bread, which thou shalt receive at their hand. After that thou shalt come to the hill of God, where is the garrison of the Philistines. And it shall come to pass when thou art come thither to the city, that thou shalt meet a company of prophets coming down from the high place, with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them, and they shall prophesy. And the Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man."—1 Samuel x. 2–6.

There are moments, you may all have noticed them, in the mind of the dullest, most prosaic man, when unknown springs seem to be opened in him, when either some new and powerful affection, or quite as often the sense of a vocation, fills him with thoughts and causes him to utter words which are quite alien from his ordinary habits, and yet which you are sure he cannot have been taught by any other person,—they have in them such a pledge and savor of originality. You say involuntarily, "He seemed for the moment quite inspired, he became another man." Are you not also half inclined to say, "Now, for the first time, *the* man has come forth. Hitherto a cold barren nature, or a formal education, has choked up the life that was in him; now it is bursting through artificial dams, through mud barriers. Now we can see what is in him." Soon perhaps he sinks back into what he was before. There are no more traces of that splendor than of a sunset after the shades of night have closed in; but it has been; it has brought something to light which you could never have dreamed of but for that momentary appearance; you feel as if you had a right to think of the man, to measure his capacity, by that which spoke forth in him at that instant more than by all the rest of his existence.

Now it is a fact of this kind which this record discloses to us. Only it is a fact not separated from the law and principle of it, but explaining that law and principle to us. "God gave him another heart, the Spirit of God came upon him,"—these are the words which tell us what that prophetic impulse denoted. Then Saul became conscious of thoughts and desires altogether new and wonderful. The same earth and skies were about him, but he himself was different. He looked out upon all things with different eyes. And this was because the Spirit of God had apprehended him. He could not doubt that God was speaking to him, down in that region which the vulture's eye had not seen: a transmuting, life-giving power had penetrated there; it had claimed his obedience, and he had yielded to it. He could not but connect this power with the office to which he had been so suddenly called. How could he be a king, if he were still the same feeble, paltry creature that he had been? Did he not need some mighty influence to fit him for this work? And was it strange that He who chose him for that work should enable him to fulfil it? However unwonted then might be the thoughts which stirred in him and the words which he poured forth, they could not have come from some irregular tumultuous excitement; they must have proceeded from the very spirit of calmness and order. Saul was among the prophets precisely because he confessed the presence of such a spirit of calmness and order. For this was the faith of the prophets, this was the design of their appointment, to be witnesses by what they said, and what they did, and what they were, that men, whether they be kings or subjects, are not to be the sport of outward accidents and chance impulses, but to act habitually as the servants and scholars of a divine master, who can show them the path in which they are to go, can give them continual inward illumination, can raise them to a point from which they may overlook the world around, and interpret the course of it.

This was the preparation and discipline of a king, in all essentials the discipline and preparation which every king requires and must undergo who is to rule a people righteously and wisely, not following the bent of his own inclinations, not swayed by some bias from without, but being under the dominion of an invisible and righteous Will, obeying that he may exercise dominion over his fellow-men. What the Scripture teaches us in the next part of the story is, that Saul did not continue the subject of this government, and therefore that he became by degrees feeble, reckless, and tyrannical. The steps of the *facilis descensus* are carefully noted.

Saul is no monster who has won power by false means and then plunges at once into a reckless abuse of it, — no apostate who casts off the belief in God, and sets up some Ammonite or Phœnician idol. He merely forgets the Lord and teacher who had imparted to him that new life and inspiration ; he merely fails to remember that he is under a law and that he has a vocation. Samuel, according to modern expositors of the story, was angry, because he felt that he was losing his own influence over the mind of the king. No, he was angry because the king was so much the slave of his influence, or of any influence that was exerted over him for the moment ; because he was losing the sense of responsibility to One higher than a prophet, to One who had appointed him to rule, not in his own right, but as the minister and executor of the divine righteousness. It was a light transgression, you will say, that Saul made haste to perform a sacrifice without waiting for the person who was appointed by the law to perform it. Perhaps you may think it was a sign of the king's devotion ; how could he neglect a religious duty for the sake of a formality ? But in that indifference to law lay the seeds of arbitrary government, the pretensions of an autocrat. In that eagerness to do a religious service lay the seeds of the superstition which God by His covenant and statutes was undermining ; since all superstition lies in the neglect of the truth which Samuel proclaimed, that obedience is better than the fat of rams, that sacrifices are not to buy God's good-will, but are acts of submission to it. It may seem to some as if Samuel was enjoining a very rigorous course, when he complained of Saul for sparing Agag the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the flocks and the herds. But a king who let his people rush upon the prey when they were sent to punish an unrighteous nation, the crimes of which had reached a full measure, was forgetting the very functions of a Jewish sovereign, and was turning conquest into that which it was not to be, a gratification of covetousness, a means of aggrandizement. The king who heeded the voice of his army in such a matter, showed that he was not their leader, but their tool and slave. The king who pretended to keep the booty for the purpose of offering sacrifice to the Lord his God, was evidently beginning to play the hypocrite, to make the service of God an excuse for acts of selfishness, and so to introduce all that is vilest in king-craft as well as priest-craft. Samuel the prophet was not trying to keep alive the habits which these names express, that he might maintain the dignity of his own office. That office enjoined him to bear the most emphatical protest against them. He was bound to tell Saul, that if he forgot that he was a servant and fancied himself absolute, his true condition would be shown him, for 'that the kingdom would be rent from him and given to another.

The next passages of the story belong properly to the history of David; I reserve them, therefore, for next Sunday. But the progress of Saul's fear and jealousy of the young man concerning whom the virgins of Israel sang, " Saul has slain his thousands, but David has slain his tens of thousands," is a part of the present subject. There are many ways, no doubt, of describing how such a passion as this enters the soul and takes a direction towards a person who had once been loved, is baffled for a while, sometimes gives way to fits of returning affection, then absorbs the man completely, till it becomes an ungoverned frenzy prompting the most extravagant and ferocious acts. But I think that one who is considering the subject in earnest, trying to turn it to account for himself and his fellow-men, will do well to pause before he abandons the language in which the Bible speaks of this awful and mental process, and takes up with any other. It tells us that "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." This was before David had awakened his fears, while *he* was still a shepherd boy, sent for to soothe him with his harp. The words therefore describe an earlier state of mind, one which the story we have considered already will make sufficiently clear to us. That calm spirit of trust and hope which had once come upon Saul, had been resisted and grieved; he had forgotten that such a spirit had been given him to be his guide and counsellor, his wisdom to understand God's commands, his strength to obey them. And now there had come an evil spirit from the Lord, an accusing conscience warning him of what he had been, throwing its dark shadow upon the present, making the future look dim and gloomy. All ghastly apparitions haunt a mind in this condition. It sees nothing as it is. It sees innumerable things which are not. Much physical disease probably attends the moral derangement. The palpable and monstrous distortions which arise out of it, are such as friends naturally seek to cure by outward applications and diversions. The servants of Saul, who could not probe the seat of their master's disorder, suggested the wisest of all methods for removing its external symptoms. The music was more than a mere palliative. It brought back for the time the sense of a true order, a secret, inward harmony, an assurance that it is near every man and that he may enter into it. A wonderful message, no doubt, to a king or a common man, better than a great multitude of words, a continual prophecy that there is a Deliverer who can take the vulture from the heart and unbind the sufferer from the rock; but not (as many, I suppose, must bitterly know) the deliverer itself.

And therefore, at the next turn of the story, the evil spirit has become an evil spirit indeed. It is still called an evil spirit "from the Lord." For that which torments us, and does not suffer us to sink into the ease and security we long for, has surely a commission from God for our good, though it come with a thousand dark suggestions which cannot be from Him, which are perpetual incitements to rebellion against Him. But now this spirit which was preying upon the man himself, has found another object; it has become a gnawing suspicion and hatred against an innocent man, a feeling that he has some deep plot against the life of his king and father, and that all Saul's children are plotting with him. Surely this feeling of suspicion more explains to us than any thing else, the nature of the retribution which a man brings upon himself by tampering with evil thoughts and imaginations, by trifling with the loving power which is so close to him, and so ready to nourish him with wholesome and gracious food. Every one of us perhaps has had converse enough with this demon, has dallied enough with his dark hints, to know how true the Scripture portrait must be, even though, by God's great mercy, we may have been saved from catching the entire likeness of it. Awful as is the misery which the indulgence of this sin causes to others, yet the punishment which it inflicts upon the heart that is the seat of it, the madness which it produces there, is something more terrible still. We are surely warranted in hoping that in a multitude of cases it is a healing discipline; that the utter humiliation which it produces works out blessings though they may never appear; though the soul may seem to sink and go out in utter bewilderment and desolation.

I have not tried to ascertain the point at which the moral guilt of Saul ends, and his madness begins. The Bible does not hint at a settlement of that question. It belongs in this case, as in all cases, to Him who said, "Judge not, that ye be not judged, for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." It is enough for us to know, and to tremble as we know, that the loss of all capacity for discerning between right and wrong, a hopeless inversion of rule and order, a loss of all the kingly faculties which enable us to exercise an influence over others or ourselves, may be the rightful and natural result of indulging any one hateful passion, of forgetting the special work which God has committed to us, of acting as if we were our own masters, and could do without Him. On the other hand, it is for the relief and comfort of our minds to believe, as we are taught to believe by all lawgivers and moralists, that there are conditions of mind to which we must not and dare not impute moral delinquency; a still greater and deeper comfort to know, that in these conditions, as well as in those where there is most of wilful wrong, God may still be carrying on His own great and wonderful work of "bringing souls out of darkness and the shadow of death, of breaking their bonds asunder."

There are glimpses of light in the later life of Saul, which we refer at once to this divine source, which it would be sinful to refer to any other. The love and loyalty of David in sparing his life, were not unrewarded. They struck out sparks of love in him; they made it evident that there was something deeper and healthier beneath all his strangest distortions of mind. And that sacred inspiration, of which our text speaks, which recalled the almost forgotten question, "Is Saul among the prophets?" though it came mixed with a kind of wild insanity, though it was no longer the prophetical utterance of a calm, heaven-possessed soul, though it was like the sound of the wind through a broken and fallen building, yet proclaimed that God's spirit, which bloweth where it listeth, had not left this building to be a mere possession for the birds of night.

Even in the last act which is recorded of Saul on the night before his death, — his resorting to the witches whom he had himself forbidden, — there is a strange and mad confusion between a real desire to know the mind of God, and a feeling that to him it could only be declared through some evil agent. He has a longing to see the friend of his youth, the true counsellor from whom he had severed himself, and when the deceiver produces some lying semblance of the departed prophet, his imagination quickly invests it with reality. He feels that the presence of the reprover and friend is there. "And he fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid because of the words of Samuel, and there was no strength in him."

A strange preparation for the fight on the coming day, when "the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul, and upon his sons. And the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was sore wounded of the archers. Then said Saul unto his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through and abuse me. But his armor-bearer would not, for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, that same day together. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities and fled, and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. And the Philistines put Saul's armor in the house of Ashtaroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan." — 1 Samuel xxxi. This was the end of Saul and of his kingdom.

He who was to be the restorer of this kingdom sang of Saul and Jonathan on the day when he heard of their fall: "They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." Was this an idle flattery, by one who knew it to be false, of a man whom flattery could please no longer? I believe it was nothing of the kind. David spoke what he felt at that moment, and he would not have wished to recall the words afterwards. He had known a loveliness and pleasantness in the life of Saul, which all its after discords could not make him forget. He had known a real man under the name. A false man had borne it too. The one was dead; the other was still alive in his memory and heart. Other questions, agitating, perplexing, almost maddening, he could leave to Him who only could resolve them. There were symbols of reconciliation in the deaths of Saul and

Jonathan. The father and son, who had been often so unnaturally separated, were united at last. David was privileged to think of them together, to let the tenderness of the one efface the hard treatment of the other; to feel that God had meant them to be one in heart and act, though the evil and dark spirit to which Saul had yielded himself tore them asunder.

Brethren, I believe it is not dangerous, but safe, not a homage to falsehood, but to truth, in our judgment of those who are departed, to follow David's example. We may dwell upon bright and hallowed moments of lives that have been darkened by many shadows, polluted by many sins; those moments may be welcomed as revelations to us of that which God intended His creatures to be; we may feel that there has been a loveliness in them which God gave them, and which their own evil could not take away. We may think of this loveliness as if it expressed the inner purpose of their existence; the rest may be for us as though it were not. As nature, with her old mosses and her new spring foliage, hides the ruins which man has made, and gives to the fallen tower and broken cloister a beauty scarcely less than that which belonged to them in their prime, so human love may be at work too, "softening and concealing, and busy with her hand in healing" the rents which have been made in God's nobler temple, the habitation of His own Spirit. If it were lawful in the old time to cover with love and hope a multitude of transgressions, it cannot be less lawful now that the earth is overshadowed with a mercy that blotteth out iniquity and transgression and sin; when the blood of sprinkling has a mightier voice than that which cries for vengeance; when the atoning sacrifice reveals heights and lengths and depths and breadths of love, in which we must rejoice to be lost.

But oh! brethren, if this be a lesson which it is lawful to take up and apply to our friends and brethren, it should come in another form, with another force, to ourselves. There has been some moment, some one fleeting moment, in the life of every man, even the most thoughtless, when he has had dreams of better things, when he has heard the voices of the prophets coming with their harp and their tabret down the hill, when he has joined their company and has caught their strains. There may have been a time when it has been said of him, "What! is he too among the prophets? Has he found that life is real, and that it is not to go out in miserable efforts for self-advancement, or in more miserable self-indulgence, that it is to be consecrated to the service of God and man?" That hour, that moment was *the* hour, *the* moment of thy life, friend and brother. To *that*, God would raise and assimilate the whole of it. O, do not let the sluggish, turbid current of your ordinary days seem to you that which truly represents to you what you are, what you are able to be! No, the time when you made the holiest resolutions, when you struggled most with the powers of evil, when you said it should not be your master, when Love conquered you and freed you from other chains that you might wear her chains, *that*, *that* was the true index to the Divine purpose concerning you; that tells you what the Spirit of God is every hour working in you that you may be. You may not be able to revive the feeling which you had then, but He who gave you the feeling, He is with you, is striving with you, that you may will and do of His good pleasure. Only do not strive with Him that He may leave you to yourself and to the power of evil.

But if you should have engaged in that mad struggle, and been, to your own ruin, a conqueror in it; if you should have succeeded in quenching that voice of Love which you once heard speaking in your heart, and now you can hear nothing but hoarse and dissonant voices of evil omen, — O, yet be sure that the Spirit of God does not desert the work of His own hands, that He is still hovering about the habitation in which He desires to dwell. And if, when you meet with old friends from whom you have been long estranged, there should come back something of the youthful impulse, some of those heart-yearnings and songs of hope which you poured forth then, though mixed with turbulence and confusion, and hardly to be distinguished from the ravings of madness, yet the question may be asked again, "Is he too among the prophets?" and it is a God will answer that question as it was not answered before, if you desire not the power of the prophets, but their obedience, not that you may speak inspired words, but that you may have the humble and contrite heart which He does not despise.

SERMON III.

DAVID THE SHEPHERD AND THE OUTLAW.

LINCOLN'S INN, 2D SUNDAY IN ADVENT.—DEC. 7, 1851.

> He chose David also His servant, and took him away from the sheepfolds; as he was following the ewes great with young ones, He took him, that he might feed Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.—PSALM lxxviii. 71, 72.

OBJECTORS to the history of the Old Testament have dwelt much upon the title, "the man after God's own heart," which is given so continually to David. "Is he not," they have said, "directly charged with adultery and murder, murder of a very base kind and for the basest purpose? Are there not passages in his life recorded without condemnation, which are indefensible upon any moral principles which we acknowledge? Do not some of his worst acts belong to his later years, when one would have expected to see his passions subdued, his higher qualities matured and perfected? Is this the man whom a righteous God would declare to be the object of His especial complacency? What must we think of the book which teaches us to believe that he was thus regarded? What impressions must it leave upon us of the Divine character, what possible help can it afford us in forming our own?"

Divines have very often met these questions with an answer of this kind. "The epithet which you complain of," they have said, "belongs to David, not personally, but officially. He was called out by God to restore the kingdom which Saul had destroyed, to subdue the Philistines and the surrounding nations, to raise up a family of kings of the tribe of Judah. These purposes he accomplished. He did the work which he was appointed to do. He fulfilled God's counsel. So far he was a man after God's own heart. His moral delinquencies are recorded, that we may know where the Divine approbation stops short."

I believe that this explanation never satisfied the minds of those who availed themselves of it. I am sure that it never satisfied the mind of any simple or devout reader. The notion of official virtue belongs to a very low code of ethics indeed. In a very artificial state of society we sometimes separate the workman from the work; we speak of that as done faithfully and honestly, while he is unfaithful and dishonest. The possibility of such a separation undoubtedly exists; but we all know that it is one of the greatest and most frightful anomalies that it should exist; we all long for the time when it shall exist no longer. Statesmen possessing no high-flown morality, trained in the school of party politics, have rejected the vulgar distinction between the bad man and the bad king, as inconsistent with experience. Lying, the great sin of the individual, has been proved to be the fatal sin of the monarch, that which makes all aptitude for business, all clearness of perception, all skill in devising theories, even higher qualities than these, practically inefficient, or positively mischievous. How then can a believer in the Bible transfer to it a habit of thinking which we are trying to banish from common life? How can he imagine that the book which he holds to be essentially true, should sanction and consecrate one of our most pernicious falsehoods?

A very little reflection upon the words themselves, still more a slight study of the history of David, should surely have prevented any man from resorting to *this* kind of apology. " God," we hear again and again in Scripture, " trieth the reins." That general principle is applied expressly to the case of David. The Lord said to Samuel, when he was about to anoint the eldest son of Jesse, " Man looketh on the outward appearance; but the Lord looketh on the heart." What can be so direct a contradiction of this statement, as the notion that David was after God's own heart, because he did certain outward acts which were in conformity with the Divine mind and pleasure? And surely if there is a man in the sacred history or in any history whom it is impossible to think of merely as an official actor, that man is the shepherd-boy who became king of Israel. There is no one who has so marked a personality, no one with whose inward life and struggles we are so well acquainted. Whatever he is, we feel that his whole mind and will are thrown into the words which he speaks and the deeds which he does. And in no life are the king and the man so entirely and inseparably blended. In his highest raptures, in the utterances of his greatest anguish, we are reminded continually that he is to become a king, or that he is one. On the other hand, his sins are not treated as what we call, in our artificial nomenclature, private sins; they are the sins of a king, affecting multitudes besides himself. As such they are denounced, as such they are punished.

I think it must have been the obviousness of this fact in the Scriptural records, which misled the commentators into this dangerous method of justifying them. They saw that David was spoken of as intended by God for a king, while he was a shepherd-boy. They perceived that all his various and romantic adventures were preparing him for a throne; they were struck with the consciousness, in his own mind, of a destiny and a work which were to be accomplished. They could not but be aware, that every thing which was greatest, best, purest, in him, had reference to a divine mission which he was to execute for his country. They could not be mistaken that he was educated for a special office. Unhappily they forgot to ask themselves what the education for such an office implied, what we are actually told about it in the Bible. Had they followed the guidance of the history for which they were trying to make ingenious excuses, they might have found how truly the education of the divine king was the education of a man; they might have come to understand what it was in the old days to be a man after God's own heart, what it is in our days; they might have attained through that knowledge to a far deeper sense of the nature and cause of David's sins, to a more earnest repentance for their own. Some of these blessings may, I hope, come to us, my brethren, while we seek to understand the nature of David's discipline. I shall confine myself this afternoon to the years which he passed before the death of Saul, the period which is indicated by the words of the text. The time of his actual government, described in the following sentence, "So he fed them with a faithful and true heart, and ruled them prudently with all his power," I reserve for another occasion.

When I speak of David as having the consciousness of a divine calling or mission in every period of his life, I do not mean that he was haunted in the sheepfolds with dreams of some great honor to come upon him hereafter. Those to whom such dreams come, are commonly impatient of the mean position in which they find themselves. What I apprehend he felt was, that he had a call to the work in which he was then engaged. He must have believed that the God of his fathers, He and no other, had appointed him to take care of the few sheep in the wilderness which Jesse had trusted him with. A strange thought, that the tasks which fell to him because he was the youngest son of the house, could be tasks in which the Most High God, who filled Heaven and earth, interested Himself. But it was *the* thought which made David's life tolerable to him, the only one which could have enabled him to work without becoming the slave of his work. The shepherd's life brought him into wide, open plains, to hill-sides that were lonely by day as well as night. How awful to feel himself there, him the poor shepherd, an atom amidst the infinity of nature! But an atom which breathed, which thought, which, in the depth of its nothingness, felt that it was higher and more wonderful than the universe which was able, and sometimes seemed ready, to crush it. Shepherd-boy, what art thou? Child of the covenant, what art thou? Fearful questions, to which the hills and skies could give no answer. But the boy pursued his task. He led the sheep to their pastures, he took them to the streams, he followed them into thickets and ravines where they had lost themselves. These poor silly creatures were worthy of David's diligence. And then the answer came. "The Lord is *my* shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh *me* to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth *me* beside the still waters. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff, they strengthen me." What a revelation to the soul of a youth! A Guide near him, with him, at every moment,—as actual a guide as he was to the sheep; a guide who must watch over a multitude of separate souls, as he watched over each separate sheep, who must care to bind them together in one, as he cared to bring the sheep into the same fold!

Let us not suppose for an instant that David, as he practised these duties and meditated upon them, gained some fine metaphors respecting the relations of faithful men to their Creator, which afterwards served to make him the poet of Israel. These thoughts and the shepherd life did bring forth that divine poetry, just because they were so intensely real, and because it was so intensely real. They sprung out of intense anxieties respecting himself. What had such anxieties to do with metaphors? His thoughts associated themselves with the humblest toils. What had they to do with metaphors? His meditations were upon the I AM, upon Him before whom Moses hid his face, Who spoke in thunders upon Sinai. How dared he make Him a subject for metaphors? When God taught David to think of Him as a shepherd, He took away that cold cloud-drapery with which we are wont to invest Him; He brought him into contact with His actual presence and government. And do not fancy that, because this apprehension was direct and personal, it was narrow and local. Then, when he could think of God as One nigh and not afar off; then, when he could believe that He cared for him and cared for each of his brethren; then he could look up into the open sky with wonder, but without trembling, and say, "When I behold Thy heavens, the work of Thy hands, the moon and the stars which Thou hast ordained; Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou visitest him? Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands,—all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name in all the earth!" Then first all nature could sympathize with him, could call forth instead of crushing the energies of his own heart. For the heavens, as they shone clear and bright before him after a long night-watching, declared the glory of the God who was his shepherd; the firmament showed His handiwork. Day unto day, and night unto night, uttered speech and showed knowledge. The sun came out of his bridal chamber, he went forth as a giant rejoicing to run his race, carrying a message to all nations concerning One whose law converted the soul of man, whose statutes made wise the simple.

This was a hidden education, the education of a young man's heart. But it was cultivating the seeds which were to bring forth fruits in manly acts. Here we are told in David's words of some of the earliest of those fruits. "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went out after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth. And when he arose against me, I caught him by the beard and slew him." David was learning the secret of invisible strength, what it is, and where and how it works. So there grew in him a scorn of that which lies in bulk and looks terrible to the eye. If the bear and the lion came out against one of his flock, it was his business to encounter them. And seeing that he was a man, made in God's image, made a little lower than the Angels, the child of God's covenant, he could use the dominion that God had given to his race. The strength was not his. In that first battle, as in every one he was to fight hereafter, the Lord of Hosts was with him, the God of Jacob was his helper.

The story tells us that there came to the house of Jesse an old man, whom all knew to be a prophet; that he came upon a strange errand which he scarcely understood himself,—to anoint one of the sons of that family; that the eldest passed before him, and that the prophet was struck by his look and stature, and would have poured the oil on his head; that he was told that the Lord did not look on the outward appearance, but tried the heart; that the other sons all passed by; that one was missing (he being the youngest, and with the sheep); that when this youth, ruddy and fair to look upon, came in, Samuel was bidden to rise and anoint him.

Here was the sign that all the inward discipline and preparation of David had an object, another object than merely to make him a faithful keeper of sheep, or even a wise and righteous man. But a divine sign is not a mere ceremony. It would be deceitful and insincere if there were not a present blessing denoted by it, the communication of an actual power to fit the man for tasks to which he has not hitherto been appointed. From that day forward, we are told, the Spirit of God came upon David. There was a power within him stirring him to thoughts and acts which connected him directly with Israelites, with human beings. Yet with this new calling, with the consciousness of this new power, he still returned to his old work. It was his till some clear summons drew him from it. It had not lost its sacredness, it could still impart wisdom to one who sought wisdom. There is a time in men's lives, before they enter upon some great work to which they have been consecrated, a time when they are permitted to look back upon the years which they have already past, to see them no longer as fragments, but as linked together, as having a divine purpose running through them which makes even their incoherences and discords intelligible. In such a time of retrospection, when the future is seen mirrored in the past, David may have found his harp much more than the mere solace of lonely hours, the mere response to his inward sorrows and thanksgivings. He may have begun to know that he was speaking for other men as well as for himself; that there were close and intimate fibres uniting men utterly unlike and separated by tracts of time and space; that there is some mysterious source of these sympathies, some living Centre who holds together the different portions of each man's life, and in whom there is a general human life, of which all may partake. The Spirit of God which had taken possession of David, may have been teaching him these lessons and inspiring the song which was the utterance of them, before he was prepared to come forth as the actual deliverer. And that Spirit will assuredly have been preparing him for his after conflicts, by making him feel that he had, even then, enemies most fierce to struggle with, subjects most turbulent to subdue. The invisible God does not make known to man that He is his Shepherd, without making known to him also, that there are invisible powers more fearful than bears and lions, which would tear His flock asunder, which would bring each separate sheep into the valley of the shadow of death. It may be true that the Psalms of David which speak most of enemies belong to a later period than this, when he was wrestling with flesh and blood; but those Psalms would not have been what they are, they would not have expressed the fears and confidence of suffering people in all times, if the writer of them had not been trained to perceive what are the real and universal foes of God's creatures, before he had to engage with those who were tormenting him and his people.

The passage of the Book of Samuel, which describes the battle of David with Goliath, is called by some of the wise men in our day a fragment from the heroic legends of the Hebrew people. I suppose this phraseology conveys some new and striking impression to the minds of those who use it, or it could not have become so popular as it is, here and elsewhere. I confess the old childish notion of a battle between a man with shield and buckler and greaves of brass, and a youth with a ruddy countenance who went forth with his sling and stone in the name of the Lord God of Israel, gives me a sense of reality, which I miss altogether in the modern substitute for it. Why the story should be looked upon as an interpolated fragment I cannot conceive. It is entirely in the spirit of all that goes before and of all that follows. David no doubt became a hero in the eyes of the men and the virgins of Israel. But nothing is said by the historian to make us think him a hero. He comes down with food and a message from his father to his brothers; he hears from them only scornful words about the sheep he has left in the wilderness; Saul smiles at his boldness in thinking he can meet the Philistines; Goliath laughs at him, and curses him by his gods. Every thing is said to make us feel the feebleness of the Israelitish champion; every thing to remind us that the nation of Israel was the witness for the nothingness of man in himself, for the might of man when he knows that he is nothing, and puts his trust in the living God. We may write the Bible again; but as long as it remains what it is, this must be the sense of it. And this is the sense which human beings want now as in the times of old. We want to be reminded, as much in the age of all mechanical inventions and triumphs, as in the age of greatest barbarism, that the shield and the helmet, and the greaves of brass, do not constitute strength; that the sling and the stone in the hand of one who believes in invisible power, are ever the symbols and pledges of victory. If to disbelieve this is to cast off Hebrew old clothes, it is also to put on the most vulgar, worn-out garments of tyranny and superstition; it is to fall down and worship brute force, to declare *that* to be the Lord. How soon we may come through our refinements, our civilization, our mock hero worship, to that last and most shameful prostration of the human spirit, God only knows. But *He* does know. And because He lives and is true, He will make it manifest in His own due time, that the law of His universe is not changed, and that by that law all true strength must be made perfect in weakness.

David, however, did become a hero in the sight of the people; they celebrated in their songs and dances the shepherd who had become the son of the king, and who slew his ten thousands, while Saul slew his thousands. A fearful crisis surely for him who had been learning by such slow, silent discipline, and now by such a signal triumph, whence all glory comes! A dizzy height for a man to stand upon, who had also received the mysterious anointing, and who might well dream that a kingdom was within his reach! He must have learned then, that there were stronger and nearer enemies than Goliath, who might turn his boast into confusion, his life into a lie. He must have struggled hard with those enemies; for we are told that he behaved himself prudently, that he was glad to soothe Saul when he was tormented by his evil spirit, that he fled from him instead of provoking his wrath. But if he had been under no better conduct than his own, his prudence, and the higher wisdom which was the source of it, would both have forsaken him; he would have snatched at a power which he could only turn to the ruin of those over whom he exercised it. He was under a Teacher who did not leave him to himself, who was leading him through the terrible discipline of flattery, as He had through the quieter and safer experiences of his youth, to understand what a king is and what his dangers are; and who had yet higher lessons for him, to be learnt in another way.

David as an outlaw is to many a far less pleasant subject of contemplation than the same David as a shepherd, or as the champion of Israel. Most people feel the beauty of the story of Jonathan's love for him, which binds these two portions of his history together. They can understand that the man who called forth such affections must have had deeper qualities in him than those which command the admiration of a multitude, — if this admiration was not itself paid to those qualities, to the frank, warm, trustful heart which spoke out in his deeds, rather than to the deeds merely in themselves. But the captain "to whom every one resorted that was in distress, and every one who was discontented," the freebooter who made a foray one day upon the Philistines, and another went down to punish Nabal for not giving food to support his followers, affronts all our notions of what is decorous, and makes us think that we are reading the exploits of a border chief, rather than a passage of a divine record. We certainly should not shrink from describing David in the terms in which the Bible itself describes him, nor try to make out a case for him or it, by distorting a single fact, even by giving it a different color from that which it would have if we found it elsewhere. If we met with the tale as simply told in a profane author, we should admit that many of the acts attributed to David, however strange and out of place they would be in an ordinary legal condition of society, were perfectly just and honorable when all formal bonds were broken; some of them (e. g. his conduct to Achish) we should say were natural, but not justifiable, in his circumstances or any other circumstances. We cannot vary our language because the standard of the book we are reading is more divine. The difference is, that while the Bible sets before us broadly and without comment just the temptations which a man in such a position would be likely to fall into, and leaves it to our conscience, enlightened by its own teaching, to say when he did or did not fall into them, it takes still more pains to make us understand what the man himself was, the purpose of his being, the light by which he was guided. David, in the cave of Adullam, amidst his wild, reckless comrades, is essentially the same man as David in the sheepfolds, or David fighting the Philistine. He had not chosen his own circumstances, he had been thrown into them. He did not rebel against Saul. He did not deny his authority, or plot against his life even when he had cast him off. He had no home, and he was compelled to seek one where he could. I do not know where a better home could have been provided for him than among these men in distress, in debt, in discontent. If it behoved a ruler to know the heart of his subjects, their sorrows, their wrongs, their crimes, to know them and to sympathize with them, this was surely as precious a part of his schooling as the solitude of his boyhood, or as any intercourse he had with easy men who had never faced the misery of the world, and had never had any motive to quarrel with its laws. He was now among the lowest of those whom he would afterwards have to govern, not hearing at a distance of their doings and sufferings, but partaking in them livingly; realizing the influences which were disposing them to evil. And here he was acquiring more real reverence for law and order, more understanding of their nature, than those can ever arrive at who have never known the need of them from the want of them. He was bringing his wild followers under a loving discipline and government which they had never experienced; he was teaching them to confess a law, which no tyrant had created, no anarchy could set aside. He instructed them by his example to bow before female grace and gentleness, to reverence the person of an enemy, to treat a king as the Lord's anointed. "Come, ye children," he says in a Psalm which a reasonable Jewish tradition connects with this part of his life, — "Come, ye children, and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that lusteth to live and would fain see good days? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips that they speak no guile. Eschew evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous; his ears are open to their cry." This is no dull sermon of a man discoursing to wretched people against sins to which he has no mind. It is the honest, hearty, sympathetic voice of a captain speaking to a band, each one of whom he knows, telling him of a right way which they may follow together, and of a wrong way into which he is as much in danger of straying as themselves. He speaks to them of a God who thinks of them, who is watching over them, who does not despise their poverty, who will avenge their wrongs; but who desires above all that they should be right, who is willing and able to make them right.

And this was the lesson which David was at the same time taking home to his own inmost heart. Through oppression, confusion, lawlessness, he was learning the eternal and essential righteousness of God.

He had been taught to despise the brute force of the lion and the bear and the Philistine before; he was now taught to despise all power whatsoever, lodged in men circumcised or uncircumcised, which was maintaining itself against right. He was set in the throne who judged right. "Hear the right; attend unto my cry!" he could say, with confidence that the prayer would at last be answered. He was sure that, though the kings of the earth might gather together, and say, "Let us break these bands of right asunder, and cast away these cords from us," He that sitteth in the heavens would laugh, the Lord would have them in derision. He had set His righteous king upon the holy hill of Zion, and all the nations must do him homage.

The time came when David's faith in the existence of a righteous kingdom, which had its ground in the unseen world, and which might exhibit itself really though not perfectly in this, was to be brought to the severest of all trials. Saul died on the mountains of Gilboa: the Philistines possessed themselves of the cities of Israel. The new mode of government for which the people craved so earnestly had been tried, — they had become like the countries round about, — these countries were now their masters. They had gained such a king as they had imagined, — a leader of their hosts. They had lost law, discipline, and fellowship; now their hosts had perished. Could there come order out of this chaos? Whence was it to come? From a band of freebooters? That was to be seen. If the chief of this band thought of setting up a dominion for himself, of making his followers possessors of the lands from which they had been driven out, of putting down his private enemies, of rising by the arms of soldiers and the choice of a faction to be a tyrant, his life would be merely a vulgar tale such as age after age, civilized and barbarous, has to record, — a tale that would be merely dull and flat from its frequent repetition, from the utter absence of any thing but the lowest purposes and the pettiest plotting in the actor, if we could lose the sad reflection that millions of human beings are interested in events which the onlooker may be disposed to regard with indifference or contempt, and the consolatory recollection, that, by the crimes of foolish, feeble men, God is bringing forth His wisdom and righteousness into clear light. But if David took this disordered, miserable country of his fathers into his hands, not as a prize which he had won, but as a heavy and awful trust that was committed to him, a trust for which he had been prepared in the sheepfolds, which he could only administer while he remembered that the Lord was his Shepherd and that He was the Shepherd of every Israelite and of every man on the earth, — then, however hopeless seemed the materials with which he had to work, and which he had to mould, he might believe confidently that he should be in his own day the restorer of Israel, and the witness and prophet of the complete restoration of it and of mankind.

This, brethren, was the man after God's own heart, the man who thoroughly believed in God, as a living and righteous Being; who in all changes of fortune clung to that conviction; who could act upon it, live upon it; who could give himself up to God to use him as he pleased; who could be little or great, popular or contemptible, just as God saw fit that he should be; who could walk on in darkness secure of nothing but this, that truth must prevail at last, and that he was sent into the world to live and die that it might prevail; who was certain that the triumph of the God of Heaven would be for the blessing of the most miserable outcasts upon earth. Have we asked ourselves how the Scripture can dare to represent a man with David's many failings, with that eager, passionate temper which evidently belonged to him, with all the manifold temptations which accompany a vehement, sympathetic character, with the great sins which we shall be told of hereafter, as one who could share the counsels and do the will of a Holy Being? O, rather let us ask ourselves, whether, with a plausible exterior, a respectable behavior, an unimpeachable decorum in the sight of men, we can ever win this smile, hear this approving sentence. The words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," are not spoken by the Judge of all now, will not be spoken in the last day, to him who has found, in his pilgrimage through this world, no enemies to fight with, no wrongs to be redressed, no right to be maintained. How many of us feel, in looking back upon acts which the world has not condemned, which friends have perhaps applauded, "We had no serious purpose there; we merely did what it was seemly and convenient to do; we were not yielding to God's righteous will; we were not inspired by His love"! How many of us feel that our bitterest repentances are to be for this, — that all things have gone so smoothly with us, because we did not care to make the world better or to be better ourselves! How many of us feel that those who have committed grave outward transgressions, into which we have not fallen because the motives to them were not present with us, or because God's grace kept us hedged round by influences which resisted them, may nevertheless have had hearts which answered more to God's heart, which entered far more into the grief and the joy of His Spirit, than ours ever did! And that such lamentations for the past may not be fruitless, let us ask, for the time to come, that we may not be of the class which Christ describes by the mouth of His Apostle, as neither hot nor cold; that He will fill us with a burning zeal in His service; that He will make us indifferent where or among whom our lot is cast, among princes or among outlaws, whether we are respected or scorned; so long as we may but testify to all, that He who took upon Him the form of a servant, He who was despised and rejected of men, the true Man after God's own heart, the Son of David and the Son of God, is the present and eternal Shepherd, to whom the weary and wandering may turn for help and guidance now, since he has passed through the valley of the shadow of death for them; from whom they may expect fuller deliverance hereafter, seeing that He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

SERMON IV.

DAVID THE KING.

LINCOLN'S INN, 3D SUNDAY IN ADVENT. — Dec. 14, 1851.

"And David perceived that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted His kingdom for His people Israel's sake." — 2 SAMUEL v. 12.

THIS language, some may think, would have been suitable and pious, if an extraordinary, evidently miraculous event had raised David to the throne of Israel. Such an event might have enabled him to perceive that he was divinely elected to reign; he might have continued to reign with the same comfortable assurance. But he appears to have risen quite as slowly, — under the same course of accidents, — as other leaders of troops in tolerably quiet conditions of society, to say nothing of those which are utterly anarchical. He belonged to an honorable tribe, he had performed great exploits, he had strong popular sympathy with him, increased by the unfair treatment he had undergone from Saul. He had the command of a body of compact, devoted, even desperate followers. Saul and Jonathan were dead. Battles and assassinations, perpetrated by men hoping to gain rewards from him, or under the influence of private enmity, removed his rivals out of his way. What man, who has not taken some very outrageous method of establishing his power, might not say that the Lord had bestowed his dominion upon him, if that phrase became the lips of the shepherd sovereign?

This is a question which I am not able to answer. I do not know what king might not safely adopt these words, and ought not to adopt them. The danger, I fancy, lies in the disbelief of them, or in the idle use of them when no definite meaning is attached to them. So far from admitting that David would have had more right, or would have been more likely, to think and speak as he did, if some angel suddenly appearing had placed the crown upon his head, I apprehend that the strength and liveliness of his conviction arose from the number of conspiring accidents, often seemingly cross accidents, which had led him into so new and dangerous a position. It was the successiveness, the continuity, of the steps in his history, which assured him that God's hand had been directing the whole of it. One startling event would have made no such impression upon him. *That* he might have referred to chance, or to the rare irregular interference of an omnipotent being. Only such a Being as the Lord God of Abraham, only one who had guided each patriarch and the whole nation from age to age through strange unknown ways, could have woven the web of his destinies, could have controlled his proceedings and the proceedings of indifferent, of unrighteous men. Had David, instead of maintaining the ground which circumstances pointed out to him as his, seized violently that which was not his, he would not have perceived that the Lord had made him king of Israel; he would have felt that he had made himself so, and would have acted upon that persuasion.

For the two clauses of the sentence are intimately and inseparably connected. David perceived that God had established his kingdom, and he knew that He had exalted it for his people Israel's sake. A government which a man wins for himself he uses for himself. That which he inwardly and practically acknowledges as conferred upon him by a righteous being cannot be intended for himself. And thus it is, that the early and mysterious teaching of David while he was in the sheepfolds, bore so mightily upon his life after he became a king. The deepest lesson which he had learnt was, that he himself was under government; that in his heart and will was the inmost circle of that authority which the winds and the sea, the moon and the stars, obeyed. We have seen how the sense of this invisible kingdom was awakened in him, how it was quickened by all joyful and bitter experiences, by the care of sheep and the society of outlaws. To understand that the empire over wills and hearts is the highest which man can exercise, because it is the highest which God exercises; to understand that his empire cannot be one of rough compulsion, because the divinest power is not of this kind; to understand that the necessity for stern, quick, inevitable punishment, arises from the unwillingness of men to abide under a yoke of grace and gentleness; to understand that the law looks terrible and overwhelming to the wrong-doer, just because he has shaken off his relation to the Person from whom law issues, in whom dwells all humanity and sympathy, all forgiveness and reclaiming mercy, — this was the highest privilege of a Jewish king, that upon which the rightful exercise of all his functions depended.

Two memorable passages in the history of David, the establishment of his capital, and the removal of the ark to the hill above it, illustrate the principles upon which his kingdom stood, and show wherein it differed from the great Asiatic empires which were contemporary with it, and which had existed nearly in the same form perhaps centuries before the birth of Abraham. The first sign of the unity of *these* monarchies was the building of some great city, Babylon, or Calah, or Nineveh. The inhabitants of such cities felt that they were a people because they were compassed with walls. Within those walls there speedily were built temples to some of the powers of nature which they feared. Very soon, as we now have such good means of knowing, the arts of sculpture came forth, doing honor to animal forms, which for their strength or their swiftness were believed to be divine. With a great hunter as a ruler, with one of these cities as the centre of their strength, with divinities thus conceived and visibly represented as their protectors, these Asiatic worlds continually enlarged their limits, absorbed new tribes into themselves, acquired the titles of conquest and glory for one or another of their temporary masters. The commonwealth of Israel began in open plains and pastures. A single man, who had not a foot of earth for his possession, was its founder. A family of colonists, still dwelling on a land which was not theirs, succeeded to him. These became a race of Egyptian captives. They acquired laws, festivals, a polity, first in a wilderness. They struggled hard for generations with the corrupted people of the land into which they came. Only after centuries of conflicts, discomfitures, humiliations, they acquired a king, and a city which he could make the centre of their tribes. But these had been centuries of moral and political progress, of the deepest experiences for individuals and for the whole nation, respecting the grounds of their social existence and the relation in which they stood to the visible and invisible world. All this time they had been learning to worship a Being who was not to be made in the likeness of things in heaven above or in the earth beneath; to apprehend him as a present, unseen Lawgiver, Judge, Deliverer, in whom they might put their trust. They learnt that a nation built upon fear and distrust must be evil while it lasts, and must at length come to ruin. Here are the two kinds of civilization; the civic life, the life of cities, is in one the beginning, is in the other the result, of a long process. But in the first you have a despotism, which becomes more expansive and more oppressive from day to day: expansive everywhere except in the spirits of those it rules; *they* are more contracted from year to year: oppressive of every thing but crime and disorder; *they* possess growing activity and freedom. In the other case, you have a struggle, sometimes a weary struggle; but it is the struggle of spirits, it is a struggle for life. And God himself is helping that struggle, is working with and for the spirits whom He has formed, is bringing them out of darkness into an ever clearer and broader light, out of confusion into a real, at last even to something like a visible and outward unity.

But this unity does not stand in the walls of the capital city, even though that city be the holy city and the city of peace. When David had made this conquest from the Jebusites, and had set up his throne in it, he was impatient till he had brought the Ark of God there, and placed it, with songs and shoutings and dancings, on the holy hill. That Ark had been the witness to the people that they were one people, because they had the one God dwelling in the midst of them while they were shifting their tents continually in the wilderness, perishing from heat and drought, sighing for the slavery if they might but have the flesh-pots of Egypt. It was to be the witness of the same truth to those who were dwelling in settled habitations, who were under a native government, whose hunger and thirst were not quenched by manna from heaven or by water from a rock, but by the produce of ordinary fields and fountains. It spoke to them, as it had to the others, of a permanent Being, of a righteous Being, always above His creatures, always desiring fellowship with them, a fellowship which they could only realize when they were seeking to be like Him. "Lord, who shall ascend to Thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in Thy holy hill?" — so spake David as he brought the Ark to its resting-place. — "Even he that hath clean hands and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his eyes unto vanity, nor sworn to deceive his neighbor."

The moral being of the nation, then, as of each individual of it, stood in the confession of a person absolutely good, the ground of all goodness in His creatures, accessible to them while they sought Him with fear and reverence as the King, Protector, Friend, of each and of all. There could be no lesson to a king so deep and solemn as this, respecting the nature, condition, and bulwarks of his own authority; no warning so fearful against forgetting that the bond which united him to his subjects, was also the bond which united him to God. He ruled so long as his throne was based upon righteousness; the moment he sought for any other foundation, he would become weak and contemptible. All David's discipline had been designed to settle him in this truth. He was the man after God's own heart, because he so graciously received that discipline and imbibed that truth. The signal sin of his life confirmed it still more mightily for himself and for all ages to come.

I have shown in what respect David was not an ordinary Oriental monarch, but the very opposite of one.

The history tells us as plainly, that there were points in which he resembled the sovereigns of the East of that day, and the Caliphs and Sultans of later times. He had his wives and his concubines. No divine edict told him that such indulgence was unlawful. For thanks be to God, though He makes use of edicts and statutes, it is not by these mainly that He rules the universe. The Bible, as we have seen, is from first to last the history of a practical education, God leading men by slow degrees to enter into His mind and purposes, and to mould their own into conformity with His. If we want exemplifications of all the miseries and curses which spring from the mixture of families and the degradation of women in a court and country where polygamy exists, David's history supplies them. No maxims of morality can be half so effectual as a faithful record of terrible facts like these. But the thorough correction of this monstrous evil, the full assertion of the principle which is opposed to it, could not, so far as we may judge, be brought out in that stage of the history of society. In later times of the Jewish commonwealth, when the royal power had ceased, when the people had been more instructed in the opposition between their own polity and that of the Asiatic despotisms, there was a very evident awakening of the conscience upon this subject, a growing anticipation of the principle which Christendom has adopted and canonized. The like feeling, however resisted by evil passions and a corrupt mythology, it pleased God to awaken in some of the Pagan nations of the West, — in Greece, in Rome, among the Teutonic tribes. The instinctive recognition of the true law of marriage was a preparation — the most wonderful, perhaps, of all — for the revelation of the one Lord and Husband of Humanity. Certainly wherever polygamy exists there is the most fatal resistance to that revelation; certainly also, wherever the fact of Christ's incarnation is acknowledged, there is a horror of polygamy which can be explained by no arguments, which resists all subtleties of logic, all pretended authority from the example of patriarchs, which prohibits by a fixed law what was esteemed innocent and regal among those who lived before the Kingdom of Heaven was proclaimed, even though they might be the prophets of it.

These facts must be borne in mind, if we would understand what constituted that guilt of David which the Prophet Nathan brought home to him by the story of the ewe-lamb. For a king to take the wife of a poor man, — how light a fault may this have appeared to one with the power and privileges which David possessed! Supposing there was a fixed law against adultery, did this law apply to the ruler of the land? was he not in some sense above law? Such are the arguments and sophistries which would occur to one who was wrestling with his conscience, either to give him leave to commit a wrong, or not to torment him for it when it was done. And then if the husband of this woman stood in the way of the full gratification of his purpose, or of the concealment of it, was there any thing strange that he, who was exposing thousands of his subjects to the chances of battle and death, should expose this one? Why was his life more precious than that of any other Israelite? Was it precious simply because it was convenient to his master that he should lose it? And so the deeds were done. Bathsheba was taken; Joab, by David's order, put Uriah in an exposed place where he was sure to be slain. And David, no doubt, performed all his official tasks as before, went daily to the services of the Tabernacle, was probably most severe in enforcing punishments upon all wrongdoers. That characteristic feature of a transgressor, his rapid and bitter condemnation of other transgressors, is strikingly preserved in the Scripture portrait. "And David's anger was greatly kindled against the rich man who had stolen the poor man's lamb. And he said, 'The man who hath done this thing shall surely die.'" This energy of virtue, this mighty effort to get credit with one's self for a lively sense of right and hatred of injustice,—who does not recognize it? Who should not tremble while he thinks, The evil spirit who prompts to this consummate deceit and hypocrisy, is near to me; I am tempted continually to fly from the light which would show me the foul spots in my own soul, by projecting them outside of me, and pronouncing sentence upon them in another man. But how satisfactory to think, that, while all this was at work in David's heart, it was not left to the ease and comfort which, no doubt, it was seeking for, and striving by all artifices to secure. What availed it that he could so plausibly justify the acts he had done, and give them gentle names, and could prove that they were not adultery and murder in him, though they might be in any one else? What availed it that he could look back to holy prayers and songs in the night, and evident tokens that God was with him? What availed it to argue that he must be the same man now that he had ever been? There was a voice near him saying, "Thou hast done it and thou canst not change it. God is no respecter of persons. It signifies nothing to Him that thou art called king, or saint, or psalmist. Thy heart is not at one with Him, and thou knowest it. Thou art living in a lie, and thou knowest it. Thou art a miserable heartless man at this time, and thou knowest it. And to have been called the man after God's own heart, is nothing at all to thee. It only adds a sting and bitterness to thy present self-condemnation, such as another could not feel." He understood this voice afterwards. Then the effect of it was mere anarchy, and restlessness of mind,—a condition in which man hates his fellows and wishes to disbelieve in God, and dares not. "When I held my tongue," he says, "my bones waxed old through my daily complaining. For thy hand was heavy upon me. My moisture was turned into the drought of summer." No language ever described so vividly the sense of a weight at the heart, a weight that cannot be lifted; and it was the weight of God's own presence, of that presence which he had once spoken of as the fulness of joy. With this oppression, like that of the air before a thunderstorm, came the drying up of all the moisture and freshness of life, the parching heat of fever. Did the Prophet Nathan bring all this to his consciousness? No, surely. The Prophet Nathan came at the appointed moment, to tell him in clear words, by a living instance, that which he had been hearing in muttered accents within his heart for months before. He came to tell him that the God of righteousness and mercy, who cared for Uriah, the poor man with the single ewe-lamb, was calling him, the king, to account, for an act of unrighteousness and unmercifulness. Nathan brought him to face steadily the light at which he had been winking, and to own that the light was good, that it was the darkness only which was horrible and hateful; so that he might turn to the light, and crave that it should once more penetrate into the depths of his being and take possession of him.

And this was his confession and prayer. He makes out no case for himself; he pleads no extenuating circumstances. I myself have sinned, and done this evil in thy sight. My joy is in the thought, that Thou wilt be clear when Thou art judged. If I did not believe that Thou art altogether just and righteous and true, I could have no hope. Because Thou art this, I believe that Thou canst and wilt make me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. It is not the misery which Thou wilt lay upon me for my sin, that I dread; the misery is to be false, and to continue in a falsehood. But Thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and Thou canst make me to understand wisdom secretly. I fancied, till Thou didst find me out, that I could make peace with Thee by offering sacrifices. But thou desirest not sacrifice, else would I give it Thee. Thou Thyself must give the sacrifice that we may offer it. This one of a broken and contrite heart which Thou hast given to me, I offer to Thee, and Thou wilt not despise it. When Thou hast restored the king to his right state, and built up again the walls of the city which Thou hast promised to bless, then indeed we may come and offer bullocks upon Thy altar, the expressions of united submission of kings and people to Thee, their just and forgiving King and Lord.

What was the answer to this prayer? First, the death of Bathsheba's child; next, the discovery of hateful crimes in his household; finally, the revolt of the beloved Absalom. These — answers to a prayer for forgiveness? Yes, if forgiveness means what David took it to mean, having truth in the inward parts, knowing wisdom secretly. He had had falsehood in his inward parts; he had cherished the delusion that he was free to do what he liked, that laws and rules were not for him, that he might use a subject at his pleasure. The taking the sins home to himself, instead of imputing them to circumstances or to God, had brought him into fellowship with Truth once more. He had known folly secretly; he had dallied with silly, childish excuses; he had lost all freedom and manliness of spirit. Now he had desired to be Wisdom's pupil again. He had begun, with more prostration of heart than ever before, to learn her lessons. And she would assuredly not leave him till she had written them upon his mind. To have his people's heart stolen from him, to have his child for his enemy, to be deserted by his counsellors and his wives, to lose his kingdom, to be mocked and cursed,—this was rough discipline surely. But he had desired it; he had said deliberately, "Make me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me." And that blessing,—if it was granted him in part at once, if he rose up from that very prayer a freed man with a free spirit,—yet was to be realized through his whole life and to be secured by methods which he certainly would not have devised or chosen for himself.

But, as in all his past history, the discipline was not for him more than for his people, not for his people more than for all ages to come. The kingly lesson and the human lesson are nowhere more intimately united than here. That which enabled David, crushed and broken, to be more than ever the man after God's own heart, to see more than ever into the depths of wisdom and love in that heart, was also that which fitted him to be a ruler, by understanding the only condition on which it is possible for a man to exercise real dominion over others, viz. when he gives up himself, that they may know God, and not him, to be their sovereign.

Those who administered the affairs of the English Church in the early years of the reign of Charles II. chose the passage of the Book of Samuel which describes David's return to his kingdom, for the service on the 29th of May. There was a solemn warning in their selection. History has turned it into bitter irony. The use of this lesson forbids us to forget the certain and terrible truth, that years of hard adversity and suffering do not of themselves fit a man to reign; that they may be worse than wasted upon him; that he may come out of them more reckless and heartless, more ignorant of any government exercised over himself, less conscious of any responsibility for the government which he exercises over others, than he went into them. For our own individual benefit, as well as for the sake of nations, we should lay this doctrine, hard though it be, to heart. Adversity is in itself as little gracious as prosperity. Moral death may be the fruit of one as much as of the other. It was otherwise with David, not because adversity had any especial influence over him which it has not over us, but because he accepted it as God's punishment and medicine, because he believed that God would do the good for him which adversity could not do.

One of the best proofs, it seems to me, that his schooling was effectual, is this, that all his family griefs, his experience of his own evil, the desertion of his subjects, did not lead him to fancy that he should be following a course acceptable to God, if he retired to the deserts, or ceased to be a shepherd of Israel, instead of doing the work which was appointed for him. It shows how healthy and true his repentance and faith were, that he again set himself to organize the people and to fight their battles, to feed them and rule them with all his power; when a religious prudence or self-interest might have whispered, "Do thy best to make amends by services to God for the ills thou hast done; save thyself, whatever becomes of thy people Israel." These ungodly suggestions, the like of which came as angels of light to so many Christian monarchs in the Middle Ages and sent them to do penance for their evils and to seek a crown of glory in monasteries, may have presented themselves to the man after God's own heart. If they did, he proved his title to the name by rejecting them. He showed that he could trust God to put him in the position that was best for him, that he knew God did not send him into the world to provide either for his body or his soul, but to glorify His name and to bless His creatures. He was most devoted to God when he was most devoted to His work. He prayed fervently because he lived fervently. He found out the necessity of seeking God continually, of meditating upon His law, of blessing His name, because he learnt how weak he was, and how little he could be a king over men when the image of the divine kingdom was not present to him.

This is the impression which is left upon our minds by the general context of his history after his restoration. There are passages of that history, such as his giving up the sons of Saul to the Gibeonites, which I do not understand. I can perceive in the story a recognition of the continuance of a nation's life, of its obligations and its sins, from age to age. All national morality, nay, the meaning and possibility of history, depends upon this truth, the sense of which is, I fear, very weak in our day. But I cannot in the least tell why the death of Saul's children should have been the needful expiation of the nation's crimes. I do not, indeed, see any pretext for the supposition, of course a very ready and obvious one, that it was an act of policy on David's part to rid himself of a dangerous family; there would be a blackness in the putting forward of a religious motive for such a crime, which all our knowledge of his previous life forbids us to attribute to him. On the other hand, I conceive that we are not bound to assume that the proceeding was in all particulars a just one, because we are told that a divine intimation was the cause of it. The Scripture is most careful that we should feel the reality of these intimations, that we should refer them to their true source, and yet that we should understand how possible it is for a man to pervert them and found wrong inferences upon them, if his own mind is not in a thoroughly pure and healthy condition.

An instance which illustrates and proves that principle occurs shortly after this one. God is said to tempt David to number the people. The thought that it was a blessing and a cause of thankfulness to be the head of a growing and thriving people,—this was divine. The thought that it was well for a ruler to be acquainted with the condition and resources of his people,—this was divine. With the confidence that it was, must have come an assurance, from the very existence of the Book of Numbers, that it was a right thing in itself, a part of the divine ordinance, that each tribe and its families, and the persons who compose them, should be registered. But the determination, just then, to send forth officers for the sake of ascertaining the armed force of the land,—this was the thought of a self-exalted man, aspiring to be a military chief and conqueror; a thought which was at work also in his people, and which threatened to make their organization and his victories steps to their ruin. And this tendency in king and people was checked by a sweeping pestilence, which brought them back to the feeling that their power did not lie in the number of men capable of bearing arms; that, if this were their reliance, they would soon be swallowed up by empires immeasurably greater than themselves, the habits and false notions of which they were adopting. I do not know any thing so instructive to us, if we use them as we ought, as these passages in the Bible, which teach us that all good thoughts, counsels, just works, come from the Spirit of God, and at the same time, that we are in the most imminent peril at every moment of turning the divine suggestions into sin, by allowing our selfish and impure conceits and rash generalizations to mix with them.

We have seen that the life of David is the life neither of a mere official fulfilling a purpose in which he has no interest, nor of a hero without fear and without reproach; but of a man inspired by a divine purpose, under the guidance of a divine teacher, liable to all ordinary errors, as likely as any of us to fall into great sins. The interest we feel in him is strong and personal. It is not won from us by a single exaggeration of his merits, by the least attempt to surround him with some unnatural halo of glory. We should have wished, perhaps, to see his sun setting with peculiar splendor, to be told of some great acts, or hear some noble words, which would assure us that he died a saint. The Bible does not in the least satisfy this expectation. It represents him in the bodily feebleness, in something like the dotage, of old age. The last sentences which are reported of him concern the after administration of his son's kingdom, and the punishment of some of his mischievous subjects. Of all his words they are, perhaps, those which we the least care to remember. We must turn elsewhere than to the books of the Old or of the New Testament for deathbed scenes. One beautiful record of the first deacon of the Church, who prayed for his countrymen, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," is all that we have of martyrology in the Bible. Its warriors fight the good fight. We know that in some battle or other they finish their course. Where, or how, under what circumstances of humiliation or triumph, we are not told. If it pleased God that their lamp should shine out brightly at the last, that was well, for He was glorified in their strength. If it pleased Him that the light should sink and go out in its socket, that was well too; for he was glorified in their weakness. Not by momentary flashes does God bid us judge of our fellow-creatures; for He who reads the heart, and sees the meaning and purpose of it, judges not of them by these. And never be it forgotten, that at the death which has redeemed all other deaths and made them blessed, there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour, and that a cry came out of the darkness, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

If you would judge of David, of what he was, and what he looked for, let this Psalm be your guide. "Give the king thy judgments, O God! and thy righteousness unto the king's son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment. He shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. He shall redeem their souls from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in his sight. There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth. His name shall endure for ever, his name shall be continued as long as the sun, and men shall be blessed in him. All nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things, and blessed be His glorious name for ever, and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended."

And with that aspiration and hope, brethren, may our prayers be ended. May it be the business of our lives to testify, that there is a righteous kingdom established upon the earth, and that God has set it up, and that His Son, who has made himself one with all poor and suffering men, is at the head of it; and that it shall prevail over all oppression and violence; and that all nations shall be blessed by it. Let us grapple this faith to our inmost souls now, when men think, and openly proclaim, that law and order are based, not on the will and mind of a gracious God who cares for His creatures, but are to be the tools and servants of a grasping Mammon; now, when we have proofs openly before our eyes, how that low, grovelling, godless conviction leads at last to the trampling down of all law, to the setting up of the most hateful lawless tyranny. Let us not merely detest such outrages upon God's order, but scorn them as essentially weak, as predestined to destruction, however, for a time, He may permit them for the chastisement of the sins and idolatries of other nations, nay, even if He should see fit to use them for the chastisement of our own. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evil-doers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

SERMON V.

THE WISE KING.

LINCOLN'S INN, 4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT. — DEC. 21, 1851.

> And Solomon said, "Thou hast showed unto thy servant David, my father, great mercy, according as he walked before Thee in truth and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with Thee: and Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that Thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord, my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my father; and I am but a little child ; I know not how to go out or come in. And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast chosen, a great people that cannot be counted or numbered for multitude. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad; for who is able to judge this Thy so great people?" — 1 KINGS iv. 6 – 9.

THE seventy-second Psalm, part of which I read to you last Sunday, because it contains, if not the last words, yet the habitual wishes, the inmost heart of David, speaks of a son in whose days there should be abundance of peace, to whom should be given of the gold of Arabia, whose name should remain among the posterities. That these words were fulfilled in the peaceful and glorious reign of Solomon, most readers believe. That there are other words in that Psalm which speak of blessings far beyond any which came upon Israel or upon the earth then, or perhaps have come upon it since, they also believe. How are we to connect the different passages together? which may we assign to the immediate successor, which point to some distant, unrealized future?

Though this inquiry concerns the sense and interpretation of all the Psalms, nay, the very nature of Prophecy itself, I propose to speak of it only as it bears upon the subject which comes under our notice this afternoon. There can be no doubt, I conceive, that the dream of transmitting his kingdom to a child of his own had often visited the mind of David. We should naturally conclude that he fixed upon the favorite Absalom as his successor. His rebellion was a sad mockery of that expectation. But it was not only a mockery. It was the severest part of that discipline, so regular and consistent, which taught David that the kingdom was not his, that another than he ruled it, that it was established in his hands, not for his own sake, but for the sake of God's people Israel. It was as much a falsehood in the king to think of giving it away according to some choice or fancy of his own, as it was a falsehood in the people to desire a king who should merely lead their armies and make them like the other nations. But just as the self-willed and sensual longing which caused Samuel so much sorrow was the perversion of a divine instinct which in due time was to be satisfied, so did it prove in this case also. The desire to advance a beloved child had much of selfishness in it; the passion for founding a family, though it was of nobler kind, clung too closely to the mere individual who cherished it. But the paternal impulse and the power of looking onwards into another age, when the father and perhaps also the child should both have left the earth, these do not belong to the earth or to David; they belong to humanity; their root is in God. To keep them alive had been a main part of all the wonderful education of Abraham and of his descendants.

The mystery of fatherhood and of birth had been that which the old patriarch had learnt while he dwelt in the open plain of Canaan, apart from the corrupted cities. The desire for offspring which seemed to be accomplished in Ishmael, the long waiting for Isaac, the sight at last of the child in laughter and joy, these had been the main springs of his life; upon these all his knowledge of other higher truths — of death, of sacrifice — depended. The continuousness of the history, the links of hereditary sympathy by which the parts of it are bound together, we all feel, whether we are able to explain the fact to ourselves or not, are one secret of our interest in it, are internal tokens and pledges of its divinity.

It was a son of Bathsheba who was to teach David, in circumstances grievously unfavorable, one would have thought, to such learning, this truth which had been imparted, by a like experimental method, to the first fathers of his race. Birth became associated with death, and with his own sin as the cause of death. Shame, repentance, the desire to do justice to one whom he had bitterly wronged, bound him to his wife with more real affection than he had, perhaps, ever felt for any other. The child who was born after the one for whom he had prayed and fasted was taken, must have had a mysterious worth in his eyes; he must have looked upon it as especially given to him; he could not claim any right over it; it was God's. This child he was taught to connect with the permanence of the kingdom. The thoughts which were awakened in him as he recollected all that had been and might have been in his days, and of all that should be in his son's days, were not through some wild exaggeration, not through some artificial arrangement, but by an eternal necessary law, wider, deeper, higher, than any, even the most brilliant series of outward events, could accomplish. Such events he was sure there would be; a heap of corn on the earth higher than the hills; the kings of Tharsis and the Isles would bring presents; the kings of Arabia and Saba would offer gifts. He trusted also that the blood of the poor would be dear in Solomon's sight. But the hope which those last words expressed, rested upon the assurance that there was an inward sympathy and communion between the king and the poorest of his subjects, an actual relation between them which had been realized and understood in some measure by David and his people; which might be realized more perfectly in the son who was to follow him; which must be realized perfectly some day. The power of the prophet, his inward security that his thoughts and anticipations would prove true, did not depend upon his knowledge of times and seasons; but upon the intimation which he had of the mind and purpose of the Most High; upon his confidence that He and not the evil spirit would prevail, and that the triumph of the Creator must be the triumph of His creatures. This blessed conviction had enabled David to struggle with hosts of enemies, with his own sin and despair; it came forth now in strong, close alliance with his family life, as it had always been in alliance with the life of his nation. A son of David must be the deliverer of the poor and needy, a son of David must have dominion from the flood unto the world's end.

In what sense, then, I shall be asked, did David expect that his son's kingdom would be a divine and spiritual one? in what sense an earthly and magnificent one? I answer, he looked for no earthly magnificence which was not the manifestation of an inward and spiritual dominion; he feared no earthly magnificence which was a manifestation of it. Solomon's own history will be the best solution of the riddle, if it is one. The words which I have taken for my text are the proper and natural introduction to it.

It is very needful in the case of Solomon, as in that of David, to protest against an arbitrary separation of the man from the king, of the devout student of God's ways from the ruler and judge. The prayer which I have just read to you shows how untenable and impossible this classification is. He beseeches God for an understanding heart. All his moral and spiritual desires are gathered up in that petition. But it is understanding to judge, because "I am in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be counted or numbered for multitude." He asks precisely what he feels to be necessary for his work; he wants nothing more. Let us consider what he felt that this work demanded.

"He must discern between good and bad." This he perceived to be the characteristic function of a ruler. He must know right from wrong; must learn in complicated cases to see into the truth; to see it through the falsehoods with which it might be mixed up; to see it in spite of any falsehoods that might be invented to blacken it. Was this asking for a skilful habit, such as worldly men acquire, or fancy they acquire, by long experience, of finding out the man who would cheat them, — a habit which leads them at last to assume every man a cheat until he has convinced them that he is honest? I apprehend it must have been one of Solomon's most earnest desires that he might be saved from this temptation, however sad and repeated might be his discoveries of the tricks and impostures which men practise upon themselves and upon each other. To discern good first, that he might judge of evil by that; to be sure that, whenever evil is found, there must be a good side by side with it, struggling against it; to have intense inward sympathy with the right, that he might hate and resolutely put down the wrong; this was the gift which in his conscious ignorance, with the feebleness of a little child, he desired Him who possessed it to bestow. For why did he pray if he did not think that he was in the presence and under the government of a righteous Judge, who could and would teach him of His own ways, who could impart to him a discernment of His own character, and so of every thing that contradicted it? This perception, a perception which by its nature must be internal, must belong to his very self, was the essence of that understanding heart which he believed was more precious than wealth and length of days. It was a perception which implied a continual looking up, the beholding an object immeasurably above him who contemplated it, and yet an object exactly answering to all his capacities and organs, a Being who had given him these capacities and organs that they might converse with Him and reflect His likeness. It was a perception which could never become the separate individual possession of him who attained it. At the root of it were faith, trust, affection, which lift a man out of himself, which make him cleave to that which he cannot comprehend or reduce to his own measures and proportions, and which make every exercise of his discernment a means of expanding it.

I speak of this understanding heart as beginning with the confession and apprehension of God. I have been quite unable to separate that statement from the other, that it implies self-knowledge. That knowledge, says the wise heathen, descends from heaven. Some of us seem to fancy that it rises out of hell. We think a man knows himself when he discovers all the grovelling tendencies which there are in himself, and reconciles himself to them. Assuredly it is through the keen sense of evil within them that most men are educated to wisdom. But that is because the sense of evil contains implicitly the pledge of a deliverer from it, because the discovery of a flesh which is not subject to the law of God, neither can be, is never made except by a spirit which delights in that law and asks for help to fulfil it. The understanding heart of Solomon led him to revere as well as to suspect himself; to revere that in himself which was God's image, to suspect that which was seeking to make images of its own; to revere that which united him to his fellow-men, to suspect and dread that which divided him from them.

And this understanding heart therefore was a truly kingly heart, seeing that it had a rich and free fellowship with all kinds and classes of people; a sense of that which was common to them all; a power of entering into that which was peculiar to their crafts, localities, temperaments; a facility of distinguishing the person who was fittest for any particular service; in one word, a judgment which was not determined by any thing external, which had its laws and principles in a world that the eye sees not.

We are told that this same wisdom made Solomon a student of all natural things, from the hyssop upon the wall to the cedar of Lebanon. And if it was what I have supposed, you will allow at once that such a wisdom is precisely what the man of science aims at cultivating. He is fearful of being imposed upon by the idols of sense, by the conclusions and anticipations of his own mind. He is always seeking for that which is. He seeks, believing that he may find. That faith rests upon the conviction that he is not investigating a world which he created for himself, nor a world which is lawless and ungoverned, but one of which the meanings and harmonies lie deep; to be reached only by him who feels that he is a little child, and bewails his ignorance, and desires clearer light that he may wonder more.

But was not Solomon's wisdom supernatural? Are we justified in using language to describe it which connects it with that of the ordinary king and student? I use the Bible language. Throughout the Book of Proverbs you will find Solomon speaking of that which belongs not to himself, but to every ruler of a land, to every searcher of God's secrets. He assumes all wisdom to be supernatural; to be supernatural, not because it comes in sudden gusts, in some oracular afflatus, but in proportion as it is toilsome, self-distrusting, open to correction, ready to receive hints and illumination from any source. No subject is too mean for it to be exercised upon; the moment a man treats aught as unworthy of him, the eye within him is growing dim, he has become a scorner, and is in the way to become an atheist. Solomon has, however, a scale of worth; no other than God's scale. To exercise judgment upon human beings must be a nobler and more difficult task, than to examine the cedars of Lebanon or the hyssop on the wall, because man is made in God's image.

We have now a partial fulfilment of the desires of David for his son. It is clear that Solomon's notion of a king is not one derived from any outside appearances, any mere signs of splendor, such as we naturally associate with an Eastern sovereign. It is clear that the king is not, according to him, a man removed from contact with his subjects, regarding himself as a being of a different nature from them. He is not one who attains power, or keeps it, by force or by fraud.

He is not one who thinks he can make laws according to his pleasure. A kingdom firmer and more everlasting than the hills, a kingdom which must last always, he finds established. What its principles are, he is to learn gradually; trying to exhibit them as he becomes aware of them; acquiring more insight into them from the effort to carry them out. Every transgression of order on his part is not more an act of tyranny than of rebellion; a violation of his duty to subjects, because it is a defiance of his Master.

But the daily contemplation of these laws of heavenly government does not excuse him from dealing with the things of earth. If he shrinks from handling them, if he does not think that they are given to men to mould and subdue, he renounces his belief in the Divine rule; he does not really feel that it is supreme, and claims all created powers as its ministers. Upon this principle Solomon acted. The wood and stone of the earth are God's gifts to man. They are not merely dead things. They are capable of being shaped into form, of being quickened with thought, of expressing that sense of order and unity which is in the heart of man, of confessing and proclaiming the source of it. The king believes that he is called to build a temple. The ark had been brought to the holy hill. It was there as an abiding witness of an invisible presence, as an assurance to the city and to the whole land that in God was the secret of their strength, the ground of their national fellowship. But why should that which was there as a sign and pledge of permanence be more capable of being moved, be less solid than the habitations of perishing men? If a city was to grow up, if the kingdom of Israel was coming forth before the eyes of men, it ought to proclaim in some august and enduring form what its existence meant; it should not attract glory to itself, but should show to whom it referred its glory. I express in dry formal phrases that which was evidently working in David's mind when he sat before the Lord, and grieved that he was dwelling in cedar while the house of the Lord was in curtains; and that which Solomon uttered, when he prayed that He who filled heaven and earth would yet dwell in the house that he had builded. It was an overpowering sense of the inward invisible majesty, which came forth in the pillars and towers of the outward temple. And we must contradict Scripture if we deny that this was a very great onward step in the education of the Jewish nation. The temple became a school for the prophets. As they meditated in it and upon it, they were led into profounder intuitions of the Divine presence and government, into a clearer recognition of God as the Lord of the whole earth, into a greater assurance of the triumphs which the unseen righteousness would achieve over all sensual idols, and over all divided evil powers, than had ever been vouchsafed to earlier patriarchs and legislators. And where there was this progress in inward discovery and knowledge, we may be sure that the whole national economy, amidst all real and apparent discouragements, was unfolding itself.

The temple Solomon looked upon as the consecration of the city itself, and of all earthly treasures, to the God of Abraham. He could therefore build his own palace for thirteen years; could fetch cedar-trees and fir-trees from Tyre, could receive camels from Arabia with spices and precious stones, could send his ships to Eziongeber, could multiply chariots and horses, could look without fear upon the abundance of silver and gold. This splendor was assuredly a sign to that time, and a sign to all times afterwards, of the divine purpose which was announced in the original creation of man; that it can never become abortive, and that no blasphemous notions of the evil of natural things should be allowed for a moment to set it at naught. The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof. This was a lesson which was never to be forgotten, or to be separated from the other, that he only can dwell in the tabernacle or rest upon the holy hill whose hands are pure, who has not lifted up his hand to deceive his neighbor, or given his money upon usury.

But it is impossible not to perceive that such a time as this of Solomon, though a really great one, is a critical one for any nation. The idea of building a house which the Lord would fill with his glory, was a recognition of God as eternally ruling over that people and over all people. Yet there lay close to it a tendency to make the invisible visible; to represent the holy presence as belonging to the building, instead of the building as being hallowed and glorified by the presence. There was no necessity that this evil should grow out of that good; in a very important sense, one is the testimony against the other; still, all experience, and none more decisively than the experience of the Israelites, prepares us to expect such a result. And here I believe is the precious moral of Solomon's history, that which makes it a perfectly harmonious history in spite of the incongruities in his own life. There was the seed of idolatry in him, as there is in every man. That early prayer for an understanding heart was the prayer against it; the prayer for an inward eye to look through the semblances of things to their reality; for a continual revelation of that which passeth show. The prayer was answered, as fully as any prayer ever was. The divine judgment, the discrimination of good and bad, came to Solomon; it was not limited in any direction;

it could be exercised on persons as on things; it was shown to be the faculty which a king requires, because it is that which a man requires, since by it God perceives the thoughts and intents of the heart. But there comes a moment when the king or the man ceases to desire that the light should enter into *him*, should separate the good from the bad in *him*. There comes a time when his faculty begins to be regarded as a craft, when he half suspects that the light by which he sees is his own. Then appears the tempter. He may come in the form of an Egyptian princess, or any other; but he will in some way appeal to the senses; he will point the road to idolatry. The secret desire of the heart, mightily resisted once, will be allowed to prevail; it will convert all that once checked it to its nourishment. The gold and the silver, not of the palace only, but of the temple, — not the glory only of the kingdom, but of the sanctuary, — will strengthen and deepen the falsehood of the inner man. The glorious power of judging, which enabled one who knew not how to go out or to come in, to look into the hardest cases and to resolve them, itself receives the yoke and bows to the image; its keenness and subtilty only inventing arguments and apologies for the shame. And the sympathizing king who sent his people away with gladness of heart, sure that God was the King, and that they had a human king who felt towards them as He felt, would gradually become a tyrant, laying on his subjects Egyptian burdens, compelling them to do the work of beasts, proving that he valued the stones, the iron, and the brass which formed the materials of God's house above the living beings who were to draw nigh to offer their supplications in it. So the wise king may prepare his subjects for rebellion and his kingdom for division.

A lesson surely full of instruction and wisdom for all kings and for all men; for those who think and for those who act; for those who study the secrets of the human heart, and for those who investigate the meaning of nature; for those who despise the arts and wealth of the world, and for those who worship them; for those who hold strength and glory to be the Devil's, and for those who covet them and hunt after them as if they were divine; for nations upon which God has bestowed mechanical knowledge and the blessed results of it; for nations which look upon human beings as only the machines and the producers of a certain amount of physical enjoyments. But though so full of instruction, it would be utterly melancholy and oppressive — seeing that it speaks of retrogression instead of progress, of folly coming forth from wisdom, death from life — if there were no sequel to the story. But the Wisdom which Solomon prayed for and pursued with so true and earnest a heart was not a Wisdom which could die with him, or which his forgetfulness of it could kill. "The Lord possessed me," says the writer of the book of Proverbs, "in the beginning of His way before His works of old. I was set up for everlasting, from the beginning or ever the earth was." "In the beginning was the Word," says Saint John, "and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." "And this Word," so we shall read on Christmas day, "was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." This is the King "who shall be found as long as the sun and the moon endureth, whom all nations shall call blessed." This is that Son "who shall judge the people with righteousness and the poor with judgment." This is He in whom the prayers of David are ended.

Brethren, every one of us may ask that Divine Word who is near to us and with us, for an understanding heart. Every one of us who feels that a great work is laid upon him, and that he is in the midst of a people which God hath chosen, and some of whom, at least, he must teach and judge, and that he is but a little child, may crave for a spirit to discern the good and bad in himself and in all others. And if we feel, as most of us perhaps do, that what we need above all things else is that sense of responsibility, that consciousness of a calling, that feeling of feebleness, which were the source of Solomon's prayer, let us ask for these gifts first. He who took upon Himself the form of a servant, and became a little child, has said, Come unto me and take my yoke upon you, for I am meek and lowly of heart. He promises us His own meekness in place of our pride. He who was straitened till his work was accomplished will teach us to understand the object and the blessedness of ours. He whose delight was to do the will of His Father who sent Him, will make us enter into the delight of showing forth God's love to His children. And so we shall understand more and more clearly that we are called to be kings and priests in that city which He hath set up, and in which He reigns, a city in which there is no one visible Temple; for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it; a city into which the kings of the earth shall at last bring their glory and honor.

SERMON VI.

THE RENDING OF THE KINGDOM.

LINCOLN'S INN, 2D SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY.—JAN. 18, 1852.

When Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring again the kingdom to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, "Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house, for this thing is for me."—1 KINGS xii. 21–25.

THE thing which the prophet declared to be from the Lord was the separation of the tribes of Israel, the revolt of Jeroboam from the house of David, the establishment of a new kingdom. Yet these events, to all appearance, contradicted the very purpose for which the chosen people existed, and confuse their history. Their early records had reminded them that they were the descendants of one man. The institutions of Moses had carefully preserved the feeling that they were kinsmen, while he had given them the new bond of a common law, and a common tabernacle. To these Joshua added a common country. The portions of land assigned to the different tribes kept them distinct; but the one tribe, whose cities were scattered over the whole country, which had no separate property, which waited upon the tabernacle and offered the sacrifices for the nation and for its individual members, testified that the greatness and security of each tribe stood in its fellowship with the rest and in its relation to the whole society. This community of interests had been imperfectly realized during the time of the judges. One of the great blessings of David's government was, that he asserted it and established new tokens of it. After the revolt of Absalom, the other tribes showed an evident jealousy of the one to which the king belonged, and that one exhibited something of the pride of a favored class. But these differences were softened, if not obliterated, after the restoration of the king. The wisdom of Solomon proved itself, we may believe, in nothing more than in his successful efforts to unite his people by making them feel that they had an equitable and impartial ruler over them. Surely one would have thought, *à priori*, that the breaking up of such a state of things was not from the Lord.

And this conclusion appears to be strengthened by all subsequent experience of the effects of this revolt. Jeroboam, the author of it, is represented throughout Scripture as the man who made Israel to sin. The history of the ten tribes is a record of continually deepening degeneracy. From this time, too, all the brilliancy passes away from the house of David. His grand anticipations of what should come to pass in after times, if they had a partial accomplishment in the days of his son, seemed to be belied by the history of his son's sons. Prophets mourn over a land devoured by strangers, "whose princes were rebellious and companions of thieves, loving gifts and following after rewards, who judged not the fatherless, neither did the cause of the widow come before them." The noblest specimens of the royal race were men, the main business of whose reigns was to remove the corruptions of their predecessors. The last and most zealous of all was unable, by his reforms, to avert the downfall and captivity of his people. All these evils are evidently connected in the minds of the prophets with the schism of the tribes. They look upon their division as containing the principle, and illustrating the effects, of all divisions which should happen in all nations in times to come. Their belief that unity would some day be restored to their land, is identified with the hope of peace and righteousness for the whole earth.

We must not suppose that the sentence which affirms that this great calamity was from the Lord is an isolated one, or that it can be explained into some general notion that all men's doings, good or evil, may be attributed to an omnipotent ruler. We shall find presently how little that general notion accords with the language or teaching of Scripture. And the following vivid passage, which occurs in a previous chapter of this book, will prove how consistent the words of the text are with the general tone of the narrative. "And Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, even he lifted up his hand against the king, Solomon. And this was the cause why he lifted up his hand against the king. Solomon built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father. And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor. And Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph. And it came to pass at that time, when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way. And he had clad himself in a new garment. And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and rent it in twelve pieces. And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces. For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee. But he shall have one tribe, for my servant David's sake and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel. Because that they have forsaken me, and have worshipped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Milcom, the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in my ways to do that which is right in mine eyes, and to keep my statutes and judgments as did David his father. Howbeit I will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand, but I will make him prince all the days of his life, for David my servant's sake, whom I chose because he kept my commandments and my statutes. But I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, even ten tribes. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David my servant may have a light before me always in Jerusalem, he city which I have chosen me to put my name there. And I will take thee, and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt be king over Israel. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and commandments, as David my servant did, that I will be with thee and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee. And I will for this afflict the seed of David, but not for ever." — 1 Kings xi.

In this passage we are distinctly told that a prophet stirred up those thoughts in the mind of Jeroboam, which led him to rise against Solomon. This prophet is not represented as a deceiver, who spoke words out of his own heart. He is a true witness for the Lord

God of Israel. He announces an eternal, unchangeable law. It had been declared that idolatry must produce degradation and division in the land. The succession of day and night might as easily be changed as this great moral relation. Solomon had introduced the worship of visible things. The mind of the king and of the nation was penetrated by the spirit which produced that worship. They might still keep up the appearance of government and of obedience; the kingdom might seem to be one kingdom still. But the very ground upon which government stood had been taken away, the allegiance of the king to a righteous and invisible King. The very ground of the unity of the nation had been taken away, its acknowledgment of a one Lord. What would follow if the semblance remained when the reality was gone? This would follow. A perpetual growth of internal corruption, of internal division; falsehood spreading in the vitals of the people, with nothing to remind them that it *was* falsehood, with nothing to prove that their kingdom had another foundation than that which they were trying to rest it upon. Such a state of things is inconceivable if we suppose that human beings are as much under a divine order as natural things are. That order must vindicate itself, must show what it is: the punishment of the transgression must be the way of proclaiming the principle which has been transgressed.

But moral laws, though they are as powerful defenders of themselves as natural laws, do not defend themselves in the same way. Human beings, voluntary creatures, are the instruments of carrying out the one, as the hidden powers in sea, or earth, or fire, are of fulfilling the other. A personal God dealing with men, will employ men as the agents and executors of His purpose. The man least likely to be so employed may receive the commission; but in general we look for some circumstances which shall manifestly prepare and denote a specific person for the task. Jeroboam has risen by his industry in the service of Solomon. He appoints the charges or burdens for the house of Joseph; that is, as we may infer from the previous passage, he either superintends the laborious public works, in which Solomon was employing and exhausting the energies of his subjects, or levies the necessary taxes for carrying them on. He is thus acquainted with the discontents of the people; apparently he sympathizes with them. It is not said, or even hinted, that he felt the horror which Ahijah felt of Solomon's superstition. The king might have worshipped Chemosh and Milcom, without exciting any indignation in the son of Nebat. He appears as the spokesman and representative of those who were oppressed by Solomon's exactions for building Millo and repairing the breaches in the city of David. The tyranny grew out of the idolatry. Though Jeroboam might not perceive the root, he could perceive the evil fruit, which deserved to be hated for its own sake; he was therefore qualified to execute Ahijah's prophecy, not merely as a dull instrument, but as one who had, to a certain extent, a righteous purpose. A promise is given him, not of immediate, but of ultimate, success. He will not shake Solomon's throne, but in his son's days the kingdom will be rent as the new garment had been; ten pieces of it would be given to Jeroboam. And they would not merely belong to him for a time. If he walked in God's ways, he would establish a sure house like that of David itself; his children's children would reign after him. At the same time, it is clearly declared to him, that the Divine purpose has not been altered by the sin of the Jewish king. The tribe of Judah, the house of

David, the city of Jerusalem, had a sacredness attached to them which would not be lost. The tribe had been chosen, the kingdom had been established, the temple had been built in the capital, as assurances for the past, the present, and the future, which nothing else could set aside. That which seemed to destroy the harmony, even the existence, of the nation, would, in fact, bring out the secret of its harmony, the ground of its existence, more fully than they had ever been brought out yet.

This part of the narrative will seem to you, no doubt, mysterious and supernatural. Such assuredly it is. And it explains to us, I think, how supernatural and mysterious every event or series of events must be which concerns the life of nations and the sins of rulers and subjects. But we soon find ourselves in the region of ordinary human life. "And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, 'Thy father made our yoke grievous. Now, therefore, make thou the grievous service of thy father and his heavy yoke which he put upon us lighter, and we will serve thee.' And he said unto them, 'Depart yet for three days and come again to me.' And the people departed. And King Rehoboam consulted with the old men that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, 'How do ye advise that I may answer this people?' And they spake unto him, saying, 'If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever.' But he forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and consulted with the young men which had grown up with him and which stood before him. And he said, 'What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father has put upon us lighter'? And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, 'Thus shalt thou speak unto this people: My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.'" — 1 Kings xii.

How rapidly the interval of 3,000 years, and all the difference between a small Syrian province of the old world and a nation of Europe in the nineteenth century, seem to disappear as we read this story! Have we not, in one sphere or other, among the patriarchs of a village, or the statesmen of a kingdom, met and conversed with some of these grave old men, who did not, perhaps, set before themselves the highest standard of moral excellence, who did not at once pronounce upon the right or wrong of an action; but whom long experience had taught the might which lies in gentle words, and the real desire there is in human beings to obey, if there be but sense and somewhat of sympathy in those who rule? Have we not also, and, alas! far more frequently, encountered those young men flushed with insolence and wine, who talk loudly of putting down the pretensions of inferiors, and of maintaining their own position and dignity, who had never yet learnt in what superiority or dignity consists; who had never begun to reverence their fellow-men because they did not reverence themselves; who thought they could meet the demands of suffering and wronged men, by boasting words and a frantic determination to maintain privileges which they ought never to have possessed; because they were not privileges based upon any real relations, upon any law, human or divine, but merely upon accident and assumption, which must perish as rapidly as they have grown up. And yet these, as the story teaches, and as all subsequent history has proved, are the favorite and triumphant advisers of those whom their own vanity and folly have already doomed, and who want parasites to put into words the doctrine which they have already received into their cold, empty hearts. "My father chastised you with rods; I will chastise you with scorpions," — this in all ages has been the childish bluster of men who have made themselves blind to the future by refusing to use their eyes in judging of that which is before them, who fancy that the power will be their own for ever, at the very moment when the handwriting on the wall is declaring, that it has been taken from them and given to another.

"Wherefore," the historian goes on, "the king hearkened not unto the people. For the cause was from the Lord, that He might perform His saying which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, 'What portion have we in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse? To your tents, O Israel! Now see to thine own house, O David!' So Israel departed to their tents. Then King Rehoboam sent Adoram who was over the tribute. And all Israel stoned him with stones that he died. Therefore King Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot to flee to Jerusalem. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called unto him the congregation, and made him king over all Israel. There was none that followed the house of David but the tribe of Judah only." — 1 Kings xii.

Here again we are on the mysterious and divine ground; yet there is no sudden or violent transition from that common homely earth upon which we were standing a moment ago. The prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite is not brought to pass by any strange combination of events. The folly of Rehoboam and his gay counsellors, their utter incapacity for estimating their own weakness or the force of indignation and conviction in the minds of other men, these are the ways by which the Divine counsels are brought forth into act; these are the messengers of God's wrath, as much as the whirlwind or the volcano. Not as if he were the author of those acts which have their source in the evil will. They are by their very definition and nature resistances to His Will, rebellions against it. But as they work out their own sentence and condemnation, they become the reluctant servants of Him with whom they are fighting; they are not only foils to His righteousness, — they actually help, as Scripture expresses it, to turn righteousness into judgment, to make the truth which they are denying manifest for their own age and for all ages to come. Deep and unfathomable mystery, worthy to be meditated on by those who are fighting with evil upon earth, and by those who have won the victory; the key to all the puzzles of history, the comfort and consolation amid the overwhelming evils which we see around us and feel within us; the deliverance at once from the debasing Pantheism which teaches that sin is only another form of righteousness, — wrong only an aspect of right, — and from the Manichæism which would lead us to think that evil may at last triumph, or hold a divided empire with God. The wrath of man has praised Him and will always praise Him. Sin and Death and Hell must do Him continual homage now, and will be led as His victims, and grace His triumph, when His glory is fully revealed. But neither now or then will they ever blend with His works, or be shown to have their origin in Him, or be known as any thing but the contradictions of His nature.

Jeroboam then was established on the throne of Israel. As our text tells us, the heir of the house of David tried to crush the revolt and to recover the tribes; but tried in vain. The thing was from the Lord. Rehoboam could no more put down the rebellious servant of Solomon, than Saul could put down David. The decree which had said that the ten tribes should remain distinct, was as divine a decree as that which established an everlasting covenant with the man after God's own heart.

And yet this is the sequel of the story. "Jeroboam said in his heart, 'Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David. If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their Lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah. And they shall kill me, and go again unto Rehoboam king of Judah.' Wherefore the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt!' And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he offered upon the altar."—1 Kings xii.

I have been careful to recapitulate the previous part of the history; because it is sometimes forgotten in this last passage of it. I do not mean that an undue importance has been attached to that passage; its importance can hardly be overrated. But the charge which is brought against Jeroboam is scarcely intelligible, if we forget that his kingdom stood, like that which was in Jerusalem, upon the promise and covenant of God. He had a right to believe, that the God of Abraham and of Isaac, of David and of Solomon, would be with him, and would establish for him a sure house. He had a right to live and act upon this conviction. His sin was that he did not act upon it. He did not trust the living God. He thought not that his kingdom stood upon a divine *foundation*, but that it was to be upheld by certain divine props and *sanctions*. The two doctrines seem closely akin; many regard them as identical; in truth there is a whole heaven between them. The king who believes that his kingdom has a divine foundation, confesses his own subjection and responsibility to an actual living Ruler. The king who desires to surround himself with divine sanctions, would fain make himself supreme, knows that he cannot, and therefore seeks help from the fears men have of an invisible power, in which they have ceased to believe. He wants *a* God as the support of his authority; *what* God he cares very little. The question is soon settled. It is on the senses and on the terrors of his subjects that he works. Something visible and tangible serves best for that purpose; visible and tangible, and yet invested with an awe and a mystery which are borrowed from that which is invisible and intangible. This would be enough to explain the calves in Bethel and Dan. But the Bible history, which always does justice to the men whom it condemns most, supplies us with another link in the chain of Jeroboam's thoughts, and shows us how very natural, and — according to the apprehensions of politic men — how very sagacious, those thoughts were. Jerusalem was not merely the capital of Rehoboam; it was the seat of God's Temple. If they had the bond of a common worship, they might desire the bond of a common kingdom. To prevent the second wish, you must extinguish the first. They shall not have a common worship; they shall have a local, separate worship; and therefore they must have local, separate gods. "These calves in Bethel and Dan, O Israel, are thy gods. I, Jeroboam, decree them to be so."

As this passage receives great light from those which precede it, so also it throws back a light upon them. We see now more clearly than ever, why the separation of the kingdoms was a thing from the Lord. It asserted the real dignity of Jerusalem as the place in which it had pleased God to put His Name, not merely or chiefly as the place in which David or Solomon chanced to reign. It asserted the real unity of the nation to be not in *a* King, but in *the* King; it showed that the only basis of any political fellowship among the tribes lay in that name which was revealed to the first father of them. The revolt of Jeroboam would have done this, if he had continued faithful; his unfaithfulness, as we shall see more clearly hereafter, discovered the same principle through another and a sterner discipline. The miseries to which it led justified all the groans of the prophets; the light which broke forth through those miseries, showing the cause of them and the deliverance from them, justified all their hopes.

All Christians have felt, — as I said the Jewish prophets felt, — that the principle of separations and schisms in different lands and ages, must be contained in this schism of the tribes. Romanist writers have of course been busy with their applications. What can be more natural, than to consider Rome the parallel of Jerusalem, to identify the Elector of Saxony or Henry VIII. with Jeroboam, and to make the prohibition of intercourse with the Papal see, and the establishment of a national worship, the same sin as the setting up of calves in Dan, that the people might be withdrawn from the general fellowship of Christendom? However arbitrary such analogies may seem to us, they have a force on many minds, — a force derived from a strong persuasion that in some way or other there must be a relation between different periods, and that the Bible is intended to discover that relation. I shall not hope to convince any person that this is not a legitimate mode of treating the subject, whom I cannot also convince that when our Lord said to the woman of Samaria, "Believe me, the hour cometh when neither in this mountain nor yet in Jerusalem ye shall worship the Father," He announced a law of His Universal Church which excludes one visible centre of it as much as another, and that to imagine such a centre is in fact to restore that merely national economy into which Romanists accuse us of relapsing.

And I could not venture to protest against this use of the portion of Scripture history we have been considering, unless I were ready to accept it — subject to that change which our Lord Himself has proclaimed to us — as a real interpretation of modern facts, both when it seems to make in our favor and when it condemns us. The great schism of the Latin and Greek Churches strikes the student of ecclesiastical records as a most startling contradiction in the history of a body which was to include all nations and races. Yet it was surely from the Lord. Idolatrous habits and feelings had been spreading in both divisions of the Church. The sense of union in an invisible Head, though not lost, was fearfully weakened. A seeming union must have been preserved by the loss of all witness for real union; the division remains a standing witness against the possibility of a visible Head ever holding the Catholic body together.

The schism of rival popes in the Western Church during the fifteenth century was as great a scandal to Christendom as can be conceived. Yet it was surely from the Lord. It led men to perceive that there was corruption in the head and in the members of the ecclesiastical polity; it led to those disputes respecting the relative powers of popes and councils, which showed that neither could heal the wounds of the Church or preserve its unity. It led to that movement in the sixteenth century, which we all, I trust, believe to have been from the Lord, and which was really a declaration of faith in a living God, against a system of idolatry, that was rapidly passing into a system of organized unbelief. In each of these cases there were chances of reconciliation, such as were offered to Rehoboam when the people besought him to lessen their burdens. In each case there were grave counsellors advising reconciliation, and noisy fanatics preaching uncompromising resistance. In each case the infatuation of princes and rulers, ecclesiastical and civil, was carrying out a divine and eternal principle, even when they were defying it. They could not restore unity by declamations, by concessions, or by persecution. Facts spoke louder than the prophet spoke to Rehoboam, "It cannot be. The thing is from the Lord."

In the last period to which I have alluded, there were, in England as much as in any country, those who looked upon the new and reformed state of things merely as a means of establishing their own power, who regarded the Church as an instrument of keeping up that power; who valued a worship in their own language, not because it brought their countrymen nearer to God, but because it was a badge of separation from foreigners; who protested against the idolatry of Papal nations, and were really making royalty, or the privileges of the upper classes, or money, as much objects of their idolatry, as the calves in Dan or Bethel were to the ten tribes. And therefore we must not shrink from the acknowledgment, that the different sects which rose up in this land, seemingly to rend the body of Christ more completely asunder than it had been rent already, were from the Lord. There were idolatries in the ruling body which made such divisions inevitable. The first impulses of those who began them were like those of Jeroboam, pure and honorable. They became spokesmen of hearts which were suffering under a burden; they encountered Rehoboams in the State, and proud men in the Church, who said, "Let us change rods into scorpions"; compromises failed, persecutions failed; the thing was from the Lord. And the lesson was repeated again in those separating bodies. Politic men rose up, who sought to make the division permanent and hopeless. The separate priest, and altar, and sacrifice must be introduced, that there might be no recollection of the bond which united them to those from whom they were severed. Hence the one sacrifice for mankind became lost in the notion of some special salvation for themselves. New forms of intellectual, if not sensual, idolatry appeared; the victims of them groaned under the narrowness and bondage, which they had been taught to call liberty. Are not many of them even now ready to turn for refuge from their sectarian faith and freedom, sometimes to the vaguest forms of unbelief, sometimes to the most perfect and universal despotism over conscience and will?

O brethren! how intolerable would be these facts and recollections, which show every party in Church and State to have been the cause of shameful scandals, which forbid us to cast stones at others because we are in the same sin, if we might not recur again and again to the words which I have quoted so often. But if the thing is of the Lord, there must be an end of all those strifes by which He has ordained that our idolatries against Him and cruelties to our brethren should punish themselves. There must be a day when all things in heaven and earth which consist only by Christ shall be gathered manifestly together in Him, when it shall be known and confessed that there is one king, one priest, one sacrifice; that we have been at war with each other, because we have not done homage to that one king, drawn nigh to God through that one priest, omitted to present that one perfect sacrifice. And those who are willing before God's altar to own that their self-seeking and self-will have been rending asunder their families, the nation, the Church, the world, may hope that God's Spirit will work in them henceforth to do all such acts as shall not retard, but hasten forward, the blessed consummation for which they look. They may ask to be taught the mystery of daily self-sacrifice,— how to give up their own tastes, opinions, wishes. They may ask that they may never be tempted to give up one atom of God's truth, or to dally for one moment with the falsehoods of themselves or of their brethren; because truth is the one ground of universal peace and fellowship, because falsehood and division are ever increasing and reproducing each other.

SERMON VII.

THE CALF-WORSHIP DENOUNCED.

LINCOLN'S INN. CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL. — JAN. 25, 1852.

Also by the hand of the prophet Jehu, the son of Hanani, came the word of the Lord against Baasha, and against his house, even for all the evil that he did in the sight of the Lord, in provoking him to anger with the work of his hands, in being like the house of Jeroboam; and because he killed him. — 1 KINGS xvi. 7.

BAASHA occupies no very remarkable place among the kings of Israel, nor Jehu, the son of Hanani, among the prophets. But the narrative in the text is a compendious statement of the relations in which the kings and prophets of the ten tribes stood to each other after the division of the kingdom. I wish to consider this subject upon the present occasion, taking it up from the time of which I spoke in my last sermon, and continuing it to the reigns which received a new character from the prophecies of Elijah and Elisha.

A man of God, who, we are told, came out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel, marks the transition point between the older history and the new. The chapter which contains the tragedy of his life and death, has been selected for one of our Sunday lessons, with much fearlessness, I think, as well as wisdom. For there is none which a timid, distrustful reader of the Bible would be more ready to pass over, and few which throw more real light upon its moral and method. This man of God came to Bethel while Jeroboam was standing by the altar to burn incense. "And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, 'Behold, a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee.' And he gave a sign the same day, saying, 'This is the sign which the Lord hath spoken. Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes which are upon it shall be poured out.' And it came to pass when King Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, 'Lay hold on him.' And his hand which he put forth against him dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent, and the ashes poured out from the altar, according to the sign which the man of God had given by the word of the Lord. And the king answered and said unto the man of God, 'Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again.' And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before."—1 Kings xiii. 1–7.

I would at once dismiss the question, whether the name Josiah, which occurs in this place, was actually pronounced by the prophet, or was introduced afterwards when the books were put together, as marking the person who accomplished the threat. That point seems to me of very little consequence indeed. I do not think the substance of the prophecy would derive the least weight from the presence of the name, or lose the least from the omission of it. The cases of such definite foretelling are rare in the Scriptures. I only recollect two; this and the use of the name Cyrus in

Isaiah, of which I may have to speak hereafter. It is extremely rash and dangerous to deduce the nature or characteristics of prophecy from doubtful and excepted cases. We may be sure that, when we are tempted to do so, we shall overlook the points on which the Scripture most desires to fix our attention.

The great business of the prophet is evidently to denounce the altar and the sacrifices in Bethel. It has been set up as a rival altar to that in the Temple of Jerusalem; it is the beginning of a new system of sacrifices; new priests will be required to perform them. "Of course," the rationalist teacher exclaims, "these *were* the offences of Jeroboam. He was an intruder upon the special privileges of the Jerusalem hierarchy; he had courage to introduce priests taken from the lowest of the people; he broke through the formalities of the Levitical law. Such a man in our days would be called a reformer or assertor of national and individual independence. Therefore he is denounced by the ecclesiastics who have compiled the Jewish records." Yes, if the establishment of visible, sensual worship be a great step in the progress of the human intellect, — if the introduction of a set of priests continually at work to make that worship more visible, more sensual, more gross, be a mode of fulfilling the aspirations of those who desire moral and spiritual liberty, — if the breaking through the fetters of a law which restrained all sacerdotal inventions whatsoever, and bore witness continually that sacrifices were not offered to appease a tyrant, but to remove an obstacle between a righteous Lord and his unrighteous subjects, — if the consequent establishment of a devil-worship, — be that which wise men of the nineteenth century after Christ call reformation, Jeroboam deserves all their patronage, and the man of God who came out of Judah to pronounce a curse upon his altar, all their wrath. And this is precisely the question, not for this passage of history only, but for every subsequent passage of it. The revolting kings of Israel, in whom modern enlightenment discovers the champions of human progress, were introducing the most unlimited sacerdotal tyranny, were making that sacerdotal tyranny an instrument of regal tyranny. The priests of the high places, the prophets of the grove, were building their own power upon the degradation of the multitudes whom they drew after them, were using that power to confirm every unrighteous decree, to remove every real moral restraint from the kings. The prophets, who, we are told, would never have been praised except in a book compiled by the supporters of a certain set of caste interests, were bearing a protest, at the hazard of their lives, for a righteous order which no caprices of human superstition or human will could set aside, for a spiritual authority which not only did not demand the slavery of the conscience, but was incompatible with it, for an actual relation between the Most High and His creatures, which not only did not involve their regarding Him as an object of terror or distrust, but proved such habits of mind to contain the very essence of sin.

Men like the one we are now considering are said to speak the word of the Lord, or sometimes *in* the word of the Lord. Their function assumes that the thoughts of man's heart and the utterances of it are of all things the most sacred; that a presence is *there* which men are seeking in dark groves, on high places, in sun, or sea, or air; that this Presence is not a phantom, not a creation of their own, but He who is, He who formed them; that the best and wisest man is he who confesses this presence with awe and wonder, who believes that he is standing before a living Being to whom all within him is naked and open, who desires that that Being should direct him, act upon him, use him for His own purposes, who knows that those purposes are right purposes, who is sure that they cannot concern him more than they concern his fellows. To a man thus taught and trained, (and the law, the statutes, the history of his land, were all parts of his training, all spoke to him of a real Being whom no man had seen or could see, but who had held converse with Abraham, who had made a covenant with him and with his seed after him, who had sent Moses to deliver the people, who had been with the people in all their wanderings and their sins,) to such a man, I say, the sight of idolatry was something absolutely appalling. He had no measure of its enormity. Only he was sure that a people worshipping calves, seeking God in high places, were flying from a friend and a deliverer, to enemies and destroyers, from the living and the true, to death and falsehood. He knew that it was so. He was certain that he was not uttering himself or his own fancies, when he said that it was so. God was speaking through his lips; God was pronouncing sentence upon that which defied Him. What signified who might stand before the altar, who might be burning incense upon it? He no more could or dared tremble at the worshipper than at the thing worshipped. Both were creatures of the eternal God. The one was setting himself up, the other was set up in contempt of Him; each alike must come down. The truth must stand fast and fulfil itself. He had only to proclaim the truth.

But how shall the idolater know it and be convinced of it? The arm, we are told, which was stretched out to perform the sacrifice, and then to seize the prophet, was dried up so that he could not pull it again to him. "Here," you say, "is a miracle; such a one as we expect in all records of this kind." Precisely, I think, such a one as you might expect in a record of *this* kind, and as you would not expect, and not meet with, in record of another kind, written by the supporters of a body which was interested in superstition, and trying by all means to sustain the reputation of it. The man of God testifies to Jeroboam, that the juices and springs of life are renewed from an invisible source, that it is another than the dead thing which he is worshipping who can dry them up or give them their natural flow. A protest exactly in accordance with that which Moses bore against the gods of Pharoah, that is to say a protest on behalf of regularity and law, and for a God of regularity and law, with whom are the issues of daily life and death, against the seeker of charms in natural things, against the worshipper of capricious deities. The other part of the sign is precisely of the same kind. The altar is rent and the ashes are poured out from the altar, as a sure and everlasting testimony that law and order shall not be violated with impunity by any ruler, under any religious pretext, that his religious acts are more hateful in the sight of God than all his other acts, and must hasten the vengeance upon those.

The story of the prophet is continued in these words: "And the king said unto the man of God, 'Come home with me and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward.' And the man of God said unto the king, 'If thou wilt give me half thine house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread or drink water in this place. For so it was charged me by the word of the Lord, saying, Eat no bread and drink no water, nor turn again by the same way that thou camest.' So he went another way, and returned not by the way that he came unto Bethel." The invisible Teacher who had bid him go forth on his journey and carry the message to the king, had made him understand as clearly, that when he had done his errand, he was to go back into Judah. He had no doubt that this was what he ought to do. It was part of his commission. The other part of it would not be faithfully discharged if this was forgotten. These words and acts of the prophet were connected with his own life, they belonged to his very self. His conscience, as well as his powers of thought and reflection, were not crushed or stifled by the divine communication, but were awakened by it into activity. And the conscience so awakened was proof against any solicitations of the king. The man of God said, in quite a different spirit from that in which Balaam spoke to Balak, that if he gave him half his house, he would not stay in that evil place.

But another temptation came, against which he was not equally proof. An old prophet found him sitting under an oak, and said unto him, "Art thou the man of God that camest from Judah?" And he said, "I am." Then he said, "Come home with me and eat bread." And he said, "I may not return with thee, for it was said to me by the word of the Lord, 'Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way thou camest.' He said unto him, "I am a prophet also as thou art. And an angel spake to me by the word of the Lord, saying, 'Bring him back with thee to thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' But he lied unto him. So he went back with him to his house."

I do not know any passage more useful than this, for disabusing us of a prejudice which the mere word *prophet* is liable to create in our minds. "If the man was inspired," we say to ourselves, "inspired by God, we must be sure he would do the right thing and say the right thing. It would destroy all our security if we thought otherwise." No, brethren; it would destroy no security at all which the Bible designs to give us. On the contrary, we shall lose a great security, we shall fall into a great danger, if we do not strictly adhere to the teaching of the Bible on this subject, but set up certain canons of our own. The first obvious lesson which this passage teaches us is, that a prophet, a true prophet, a prophet of God, might be grossly deceived. The second is, that he *must* be deceived, if he yielded to any pretences of inspiration on the part of any man, though that man were called a prophet, and were a prophet, when what he said went against a sure witness and conviction as to his own duty. The third is, that a prophet, not habitually a deceiver, might on a certain occasion wilfully deceive, in the plain language of Holy Writ, might lie. All these statements we accept on the authority of Scripture. And if we accept them, we may derive the very greatest profit from them. We are often apt to suppose that a prophet or inspired man is one who is raised above laws and government, who can lay down laws for himself, whose internal power is itself the rule for others and for his own conduct. The Scripture teaches us quite a different lesson. The characteristic quality of the prophet, when he is true, is obedience. He is nothing in himself. He is merely a servant. In the acknowledgment of his service, of the power which is upon him, his strength consists. But it is no mere impulse to which he yields himself. He is liable to all the same chance and foolish impulses as other people. He is particularly liable to confound these impulses with God's teaching and commands. He is therefore to be more suspicious of himself, more watchful against this confusion, than other men. If he once forgets the invisible Ruler and Lawgiver, no one will commit such flagrant errors, such falsehood, such blasphemy. We shall see, as we proceed, with what fidelity and consistency the Scripture brings home these truths to our minds, and with what strange openness, in the written prophecies, the processes in the mind of the seer are laid bare before us, what a witness there is of sincerity in the discoveries which he makes to us of all his inward inclinations to be insincere and treacherous.

In the remainder of the narrative we hear how the prophet who had deceived his brother, himself denounced his disobedience, and told him the consequence of it; how a lion met him by the way and slew him, but left his body untorn; how the old prophet of Bethel bade his sons lay his bones beside the bones of the man who had cursed the altar of Jeroboam. A stern punishment, it will be said, for such a crime. An *actual* punishment certainly, — one which asserted the fact, that a prophet will not be more, but less, excused for his transgressions, than another man. What was the *magnitude* of the punishment, we are no judges. A man who has been witness of a great national sin and has foretold a great national calamity, who has found out the falsehood of a friend and a prophet, and who is conscious of having done wrong himself, may not think the sentence a very hard one which calls him out of a confused world; or more hard because it comes in a form which assures him that there is an eternal order which will vindicate itself in spite of his errors and those of all other men. A man of God, who had learnt to trust God, could trust Him when He was slaying him, and see that there was a deep and awful righteousness and wisdom in the way in which the creatures of God, going forth to seek their meat from Him, may, without the least departure from the ordinary law of their kind, be made the instruments of punishing man's transgressions. The prophet who betrayed him, and then had the heavy punishment of being forced to proclaim the wrong which he had himself instigated, is surely the greater object of compassion; especially, if, as the narrative half leads us to suspect, his conscience was blunted, and he was able to understand Jeroboam's sin without any keen sense of his own. A man with a clear apprehension of the evil doings of rulers and admiration for those who protest against them, with a prophetical power of uttering the truth, yet with no love of truth or resolute abhorrence of falsehood, is a very painful, but a very instructive spectacle. Every one must be conscious of something akin to such a state of mind, some possibility of it, at all events, in himself. He should think of *that* with trembling, and with the prayer, " See if there be any wicked way in me. Lead me in the way everlasting." There is something very pathetic in the homage to a truer and better man, which is expressed in the words, " Lay my bones beside his bones." The lion slew him for returning with me to eat bread and drink water; yet I should have been glad to die his death; for I feel that he was right within, and therefore that there is a sacredness in his carcass which I would wish mine to share.

Apparently the witness which the man of God bore, and the death which he died, were in vain. The next sentence tells us that "Jeroboam returned not from his evil way, but made again of the lowest of the people priests of the high places. Whosoever would, he consecrated him, and he became a priest of the high places." The destruction of an altar, and the withering of a hand which was cured again, were lessons soon forgotten. A law once broken, there must be continual new transgressions to justify the first. A superstition once established will go on increasing and multiplying itself. At last, the sense of being under any authority will vanish almost wholly from the mind of the rebellious ruler. He will say, — using the words in precisely the opposite sense to that in which they are used in the parable, — "May I not do what I will with mine own?" As the necessary retribution for such a state of mind, he will become more and more a slave. The priests whom he has made will insist on ever higher prizes for their ignominious work. To soothe the fears which haunt him after the fear of a righteous Being has been cast aside, he will ask those whom he has put in the place of his conscience, what acts he must do that he may seem a religious man to them, possibly at last to himself.

But there are events which may put a man in mind of realities after he has been living for a long while in a fiction. "At that time," we are told, "Abijah, the son of Jeroboam, fell sick. And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, and get thee to Shiloh. Behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him. He shall tell thee what will become of the child." — 1 Kings xiv.

The sight of the sick boy whom he cared for, brought back perhaps the thought of himself when he had still youthful freshness and hope, when he felt the wrongs which Solomon was inflicting upon the land, and dreamed that he might be its deliverer. And with these thoughts would come the recollection of the man who had told him how, if he walked in right ways, God would make him a sure house. A sad and profitable reflection if he had paused to dwell upon it. But the lying habit of mind which he had contracted by converse with the priests of the high places, only urged him to consider how he could bribe Ahijah to tell him something about the child which he would like to hear.

The other person in the story is scarcely less changed since we last met with him. "And the King Jeroboam's wife came to Shiloh, to the house of Ahijah. But Ahijah could not see, for his eyes were set by reason of his age. And the Lord said unto Ahijah, 'Behold, the wife of Jeroboam cometh to ask a thing of thee for her son, for he is sick. And thus shalt thou say unto her (for it shall be, when she cometh in, she shall feign herself to be another woman): Go, tell Jeroboam, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel: Forasmuch as I exalted thee from among the people and made thee prince over my people Israel, and rent the kingdom away from David and gave it to thee; and yet thou hast not been as my servant David, who kept my commandments; but hast gone and made thee other gods and molten images to provoke me to anger, and hast cast me behind thy back, therefore the Lord shall raise Him up a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam that day. But what? Even now. And he shall give up Israel because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and made Israel to sin.'" This was the main burden of the message. There was another part of it, more afflicting to the wife of Jeroboam, more soothing to the reader, which told her that "the son of whom she inquired should come to the grave, because in him was found some good thing towards the Lord God of Israel."

This fragment of Ahijah's history, compared with that which we heard last Sunday, marks out with much clearness the office of a prophet in Israel. Living under the brilliant government of Solomon, where all had the outward face of prosperity and continuance, — living under the tyranny of Jeroboam, where all was new and revolutionary, — he had still to say, "There is an eternal order which cannot be violated. Whosoever defies it will bring ruin upon himself and upon his house. God is; a power which sets Him at naught, and substitutes changeable things in His place, cannot abide. It may be appointed to punish an evil which has been working secretly; it will last its hour; but it is doomed. The mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.'

The prophets could speak this word, knowing it to be true. And they could speak another which was more terrible. They could say, *Israel* must suffer for Jeroboam's sin. Not by an arbitrary decree, which punishes one for the crimes of another; but because the heart of the people has gone along with the ruler; because a ruler embodies in himself, and presents in open act, the temper and spirit of those whom he rules; because, if they would be saved from the consequences of his evil doings, they must turn to the everlasting King. This is a universal principle, which comes out with fresh power in each stage of Jewish history.

Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, reigned for two years over Israel. Then Baasha, of the tribe of Issachar, conspired against him and slew him. There is nothing in the records of conspiracies like this, which separates the Bible history from ordinary history. We have, on a very small scale, in the annals of a few petty tribes, just what we have expanded to its highest power in the history of the Roman or of the Byzantine Empire. Nor is the result different. The new house is like the old. The rebel and murderer becomes the tyrant. It will be said, "There is a grandeur about crimes and miseries which affect a world; but what interest can we feel in the story of men so diminutive in influence, so insignificant in character, as Jeroboam or Baasha ?" I answer, the Scripture wishes us to feel none, except so far as by a small experiment we may discover a truth for all ages and nations. Such a truth is contained in my text.

"Then the word of the Lord came to Jehu, the son of Hanani, against Baasha, saying, 'Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel, and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins; behold, I will take away the posterity of Baasha and the posterity of his house; and will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. Him that dieth of Baasha in the city shall the dogs eat; and him that dieth of his in the fields shall the fowls of the air eat.'"

The general law is repeated with the same stern simplicity, to one man as to another. "Whether you came in by right means or by foul; whether you are a legitimate heir, or a conspirator, God has made you a prince. Your crime is your own. Your power is His. Trying to be something in yourself, you pronounce your own sentence. When you think to make gods, God unmakes you." The principle is again affirmed, that a regular succession, a sure house, is a blessing to a land; that a man who desires to found such a one, desires a good gift; but that it *is* a gift; that as a witness of God's permanence and presence it is good; that succession apart from Him is a mere transmission of curses. The particular phrase, "provoke me to anger," is used here as it is used everywhere else in the Bible. God is contemplated as jealous over His people, feeling like a husband or a father to a rebellious wife or child. It is presented with all boldness to men who had the lowest, most grovelling conceptions of the Divine nature, not to flatter them, but to counteract them, to destroy the fiction that God is indifferent to His creatures or hates them, which is the foundation of all idolatry, to prepare the way for the full revelation of that truth which interprets His jealousy, and is the ground of all right faith in man, "God is Love."

I may have many opportunities hereafter of pointing out the difference between the rude monotonous utterances of these first prophets to the ten tribes, and the various many-sided teachings of those who were at once the poets, preachers, and statesmen of the two. But another still more striking contrast is suggested to us on this day. When one thinks of St. Paul now speaking to the savages of Lycaonia, now holding converse with the Stoics and Epicureans of Athens, adapting himself perfectly to the feelings of the one respecting a sender of rain and fruitful seasons, entering into the heart of the pantheism and hero-worship of the other; one moment a Hebrew of the Hebrews, versed in all rabbinical and cabalistical lore, then writing to the Ephesians in the dialect of commerce; to-day penetrating the different party tendencies at Corinth, to-morrow addressing himself to the sense of law and righteousness which had been cultivated through many generations and was not yet extinct in the mind of the Romans, — one may be disposed to think very meanly of the man of God who came to Bethel, or of Ahijah, or of Jehu the son of Hanani. Still more, when one thinks that all the intellectual gifts of St. Paul were united with and subordinate to that beautiful play of the affections, which made him burn with every one who was angry, and wish himself accursed from Christ for the sake of his kinsmen after the flesh, and feel all the slights of the Corinthians, and never bow the knee to the Father of the whole family in heaven and earth without thinking of his converts and of their sins or sorrows, — one may half despise the narrow circle of sympathies in which these men of the old time revolved, with the perversities, inconsistencies, sometimes insincerities, into which they fell. No such feelings, we may be sure, ever dwelt in the mind of St. Paul himself. These heroes of his nation were to him dear and venerable names, the recollection of which cheered him in lonely hours and went with him to the tribunals of kings and governors. In all essentials he will have felt that their hopes were one, the end, the source of them the same. While he was denouncing the exclusiveness of his people, "enemies to God and contrary to all men," he was in fact denouncing an idolatry, a separate worship, which, though maintained in the Temple at Jerusalem, was more at variance with the mind of the God of Abraham than the worship of the calves of Bethel, than the sacrifices offered by the priests of the high places. When he went before Nero, and no man stood with him, he was in fact crying out, not to a single altar, but to all those at which Rome and the world were offering incense, "You shall be rent in pieces, your ashes shall be strewed upon the earth, and the hands, pontifical or imperial, which serve before them shall be withered." When he was preaching the everlasting Gospel, the Gospel of Christ's full redemption to mankind, to all kindreds and nations and tribes, he was saying to that age and to all ages, "Fear the true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of love, and give glory to Him. For all who give glory to any but Him, to any earthly, brutal, sensual power, shall share its certain downfall and perdition."

And we too, brethren, we need not the glorious company of the Apostles only, but the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, to strengthen us in the faith of God's elect, to inspire us for the work which we have to do. We need to believe that they, different parts of the same family in heaven and earth, are watching us in our race and strife here below. We need to hear the voices of old Prophets testifying in broad and simple language, that every petty tyranny and superstition of the earth which lifts itself up against God and against man, shall be put down; as well as to hear the full cry of the Saints beneath the altar, who have triumphed by the blood of the Lamb and the word of His testimony, "How long, O Lord, faithful and true, wilt thou not judge and deliver the earth!" We need it because we ought to be prepared to resist unto blood, striving against sin, — the sin which defied the Law, — the sin which rejected the Gospel, — the sin which is rebelling against both now, in ourselves and in the world.

SERMON VIII.

AHAB AND ELIJAH.

LINCOLN'S INN, 4TH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY. — FEB. 1, 1852.

> But the angel of the Lord said to Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and say unto them, "Is it not because there is not a God in Israel, that ye go up to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?" — 2 KINGS i. 3.

THE worship of the calves which Jeroboam set up in Bethel and in Dan is carefully distinguished in Scripture from the worship of Baal, which was introduced by Ahab into Samaria. Jeroboam wished to separate the ten tribes from those which followed the house of David, by giving them sacrifices and priests of their own. From the words which he is said to have used, "These are thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt," it is probable that he affected to restore the idolatry which Aaron had sanctioned in the wilderness. He or his priests would suggest the thought to the people, or their own hearts would suggest it to them, that what the high-priest approved could not be very wrong, that Moses had no right to break the calf in pieces, that the people in Jerusalem who followed the law of Moses were really departing from a good old example, that *they* were returning to a national service. The step from this ultra local worship to a foreign Phœnician worship seems a very long one. Yet it was natural and easy. We cannot tell exactly what the calf signified to the Egyptian, still less what it signified to the Hebrew slave in the desert, or to the revolted tribes. It may have been merely adopted as a traditional symbol, no special force being attached to it. But a people trained in the law of Moses must have associated some recollection of an unseen Being even with the most worthless image. How strong such associations may be in any mind, how long they may continue, we have happily no means of determining. We only know that the conscience of the idolater becomes at once stupefied and sensitive; more and more incapable of appreciating moral distinctions; more and more alive to terrors. The thought of a righteous Being is appalling; from an object of trust he passes into an object of horror. How to appease Him is the question. The old forms may not be the right. Other nations, which seem happier and more prosperous, have other gods and sacrifices. It might be well to try them. The most powerful neighbor must be most worthy of imitation.

A king like Ahab meets the demands of a people in this state. The Scripture which speaks of the cities which he built, and his ivory house, and his might, and the wars which he warred, leaves the impression upon our minds that he was intellectually superior to his predecessors, of a higher ambition, less narrow in his notions. He had not the dread which Jeroboam felt of intercourse with Jerusalem, he cultivated the friendship of Jehoshaphat. At the same time he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. And with her he naturalized a worship certainly very much more august and imposing than that which had been practised by the kings that were before him. There may, or may not, have been animal forms connected with the service of this God of Ekron. The name would seem to impart a comprehensive notion of lordship, a notion which might express itself in a number of different symbols, which certainly would not be limited to the one of the calf, or be likely to adopt that as its favorite. Baal would become Baalim; the general lord and ruler would soon be multiplied and divided into a number of lords and rulers; but there would be attached to them all, a much grander feeling of dominion than could have ever entered into the mind of one who was bowing to the likeness of a calf which eateth hay.

Ahab would therefore seem to himself, as well as to a great many of his people, an improver and expander of the popular faith. Foreign priests, with much more knowledge probably than those lowest of the people whom Jeroboam had consecrated, would come into the land. A number of the native priests would be quite ready to adopt the worship which the king and queen favored. Though they might have some new rites to learn, though they might not like the strangers, or might be despised by them, yet they would not be conscious of any great change in themselves or their devotions. In their dark groves, on their hill-altars, they had been seeking to propitiate some unknown fearful divinity. For that divinity they had now found a name. The Egyptian idol might suggest thoughts sometimes of the dark power, sometimes of Him who had made a covenant with their fathers; the Phœnician taught them to understand the distinction, to feel and know that they were invoking another than the Lord God whose presence Solomon had prayed might fill his temple.

You see, then, why Ahab is said to have provoked the Lord God of Israel more than all that were before him. The Baal-worship was essentially the worship of mere power. I do not say that abstractly or originally it was the worship of an *evil* power. But it was the worship of power as distinguished from righteousness. It was the worship, therefore, of that which man sees without him in nature, not of that which he feels within speaking to himself. It may not have been wholly disjoined from the acknowledgment of an order and succession in nature. It is hard, almost impossible, for man to conceive of power apart from some order and government. But these ideas become exceedingly weak when they are derived from nature to man, not through man to nature. When we think that the things themselves exercise the power, and do not receive it from One in whom dwells eternal justice and rectitude, — forms which denote the most violent and inexplicable outbursts of fury, the fire and the tempest, are speedily thought to represent the nature of the Baal or Baalim, of the lord or lords of the universe. At all events, these are what man must address himself to. Some joyous feasts may be celebrated with wild and reckless license to the gentler and humaner powers which manifest themselves in the propitious breeze, the quiet evening, the sun that ripens the autumn fruits. But the most serious services, the sacrifices which those very enjoyments have made necessary, the libations of blood, must be presented to some malevolent nature which would destroy unless it were soothed. Thus the worship of power becomes literally the worship of evil. By a regular and awful process Baal or Baal-zebub became, in the minds of his devout servants, what his name imported to Jews of a later time, — the Prince of the Devils.

Ahab and his people may only by slow degrees have learnt to see their god in this portentous aspect. But the first conception of him as naked power is sufficient to explain all the acts which are imputed to the king, as well as the slavery and cowardice of his subjects. The story of Naboth's vineyard sets forth in one instance the history of the reign. The king desires some land which belongs to another man; he is ready to pay for it. But Naboth will not sell the inheritance of his fathers. Ahab is wroth and will not eat bread. Jezebel wonders at his weakness. "Dost thou now govern Israel?" she says. "Arise and be merry. I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." The elders of his city are told in sealed letters to proclaim a fast, to set up Naboth on high among the people, and to say, "Thou didst blaspheme God and the king." The command is faithfully executed. Naboth is stoned till he dies. Ahab enters and takes possession. Here, as elsewhere, the man has still a troublesome conscience checking an evil will. "I dare not waits upon I would." The female adviser cuts the knot. She sees what his heart is, and if he has power, what should hinder him from carrying his purpose into act? She is perfectly sure that the nobles of the city will not refuse obedience to a request of their master, if it only involves perjury and murder. The king and queen avail themselves of a religious act, as the most obvious and easy means of accomplishing and hallowing their design. And it was the most fitting means of accomplishing such a design. It showed how deeds of this kind are generated and made possible. The worshipper has made a god in whom he sees nothing but cruelty and self-will. There is an eternal law which binds him to exhibit the image of that god in himself.

Ahab and Jezebel and these elders of Jezreel, who are no unfair representatives of the tribes generally, enable us to understand the character and work of Elijah. He is as different from the men of whom I spoke last Sunday, as Baal-worship is different from the earlier worship against which they bore witness. One difference is indicated in my text, and may be traced through the history. Elijah speaks with repeated and continual emphasis of the Lord God of Israel as opposed to the god of Ekron. The foreign Phœnician worship is denounced, in *that character.* I draw your attention to this circumstance, because it has given rise to an objection like that of which I spoke a week ago. "Every thing," it is said, "in these Jewish records, is exclusive and national. The least intrusion of new ideas, even if they are more elevated and less animal than those which preceded them and which in part they displace, must be carefully watched and vehemently resisted. What is attempted in a great sphere and yet unsuccessfully by the ministers of the Celestial Empire, was attempted on a very small scale in Palestine; the Prophets were the protectors of the old traditions of their little commonwealth from any external refinements."

In what sense this change is true; in what sense Elijah was a witness for a *national* God; how far he was *therefore* a witness for a *local exclusive* God, or for a dead tradition of the past, the records concerning him must determine.

The first of these records is contained in the 17th chapter of the First Book of Kings. "Elijah the Tishbite said unto Ahab, 'As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.'" A strange speech certainly to be reported of a man of whom as yet we have heard nothing. What had been passing in his mind up to that day, what he had to do with Ahab, how he came to think that dew or rain would obey his commands, we are not told. We are to judge of these things as we can. Our only help for judging of them lies in the words themselves. And there is the secret: “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand.” Here we have the key to the education and faith of Elijah, as well as to his relation with the king of Israel. “I have learnt that there is a Lord God of Israel and that He lives, and that I am in His presence. I am sure that He is my Guide and Teacher, and Judge; I am sure that he is the Guide and Teacher, and Judge of this land and of its king. And this, Ahab, is just what thou dost not believe, just what thou by thine acts art denying. Thou believest in *a* lord, or in many lords, far off from thee, exercising no government over thy actions, enforcing no duties upon thee towards thy subjects; a lord seated somewhere in the clouds, or on the summit of some hill; a cloud-compeller, a giver of dew or rain when your offerings please him, or when of mere sovereignty he chooses to do it. And I tell you that it is not this lord or these lords who send rain and dew; but that it is *the* God of you and of your fathers, the God who has ordained the course of seasons, who has appointed summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, who has appointed you to till the land upon which His rain descends and His sun shines, who claims first of all your trust and your obedience, since, though you stand as I stand before Him, it is not your eyes that will tell you of Him; you must believe in Him if you would know Him. And as a sign and witness that it is even so, I declare to you, that the rain and the dew shall not come except at the word of me, a poor, insignificant, unknown man, by whom it pleases God to declare what He is, and what the being whom He has formed in His image is meant to be.” Herein consists the force of this audacious sentence. It at once proclaims that relation between the unseen God and the spirit of man, which Jezebel's priests by their services, and Ahab by his tyrannical acts, were alike setting at naught.

The Lord God of Israel, then, is declared by Elijah to be in His very nature the present God, the "God with them" just as much as He had been with Jacob when he wrestled with the Angel, and He put on him his new name. Let us see what the next passage of Elijah's story tells us about the limitation or exclusiveness of this belief. It is the passage upon which our Lord commented when He was standing in the Synagogue of Nazareth. "I tell you of a truth," He said, "many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." So that *the* person from whom Elijah was to receive sustenance, and whom, as a return for that favor, he was to teach trust in the Lord God of Israel, that her barrel of meal should not waste, neither her cruse of oil fail, was a woman of that very country from which Jezebel had come, the very country from which the Baal-worship had been imported. The Lord God of the nation, then, was one in whom the weak and poor of all nations might confide, one from whom they might ask their daily bread, and on whom they might cast their heaviest cares. It is this same woman to whose son, as we are told in the next paragraph, Elijah restored life. He who testified that man did not live from hour to hour by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, testified also, and as in the former case to a stranger from the commonwealth of Israel, that God can give back that life which he has taken away. The poor woman of Sidon learnt the amazing lesson, that the power which she had looked upon as emphatically the destroyer, is warring with death, and can win a victory over it, not for some great and holy person, but for her whose sins had been brought to her remembrance by the presence of the prophet and the death of her child.

Elijah on Mount Carmel, surrounded by all Israel, while the prophets of the groves and those that ate at Jezebel's table were offering their bullocks, or crying, "O Baal, hear us!" and leaping upon the altars and cutting themselves with knives, is a picture with which we are all familiar. If you try to recall the impression which it has made upon you, I think you will feel that it has not proceeded mainly from the sudden appearance of the fire which came forth to consume Elijah's sacrifice, but from the contrast between the fever and restlessness of the priests, and the calmness and minute regularity of all the proceedings of the prophet. "He took twelve stones, according to the number of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, 'Israel shall be thy name.' And with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid him on the wood, and said, 'Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice and on the wood.' And he said, 'Do it the second time.' And they did it the second time. And he said, 'Do it the third time.' And they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and he filled the trench also with water. And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, 'Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in

Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their hearts back again.'"

To testify by the form of the altar that the people were even then a portion of the twelve tribes, that they were united in God's sight, though visibly separated by the sins of men, was one great part of Elijah's work. But it was not a less important part of his duty to remind the people, that God had appointed the method and time of the sacrifice; that prayer to Him was not a violent effort to bring about some mighty result desired by the worshipper, but was an act of quiet obedience, of self-surrender: all its earnestness being derived from a belief in the willingness of God to make his creature that which without Him he cannot be. "O Lord God, turn the heart of this people back again! They are in an unnatural, disorderly condition; they are trying to be independent of Thee. And they have so fixed and rooted themselves in that which is false, that they cannot break loose from it. The evil power to which they have done homage, holds them fast bound in his fetters. Good has become evil to them; evil has become good. Ruler of the heart and reins, who desirest good, and nothing but good, for them, make them reasonable beings, restore them to the state of men!" To this prayer the fire was an answer. It came down as a witness that God himself is the author as well as the accepter of every sacrifice, that all fire must be false which He has not kindled.

And then we are told that Elijah performed another sacrifice. The people who exclaimed, "The Lord He is God," of course regarded the priests who had not been able to make their god hear with a rage corresponding to their previous reverence. And so it is said Elijah was able to slay four hundred and fifty of them, Ahab consenting to their death, or fearing to prevent it. A fearful vengeance surely! Does the thought occur to you, "If this book be, as is alleged, not a mere history of that which is strange and exceptional, but a revelation of permanent laws and principles, may not this act be pleaded in justification of any, even the most outrageous punishment of worshippers, false, or thought to be false, that has ever taken place in any age of the Christian Church?" I answer, I conceive this story *is* a revelation of permanent principles, just as I believe Elijah's declaration that there should be no rain nor dew, or his commanding the widow's cruse not to fail, is the revelation of a permanent principle. The one shows forth God's indignation against those who corrupt and demoralize a nation by trading in religious arts and fears, just as the others show God's continual government over the outward universe and His protecting care over every person who dwells in it. The method in which the revelation of these truths was made, belongs to a peculiar period of the world's history. In a general way it may be said to belong to the whole Jewish dispensation, including in that the period down to the destruction of Jerusalem. In another sense it belonged to the special circumstances of the time in which Elijah was living. We do not need to have prophets executing these purposes of the divine government, which famines, pestilences, revolutions, execute without them, or those which are accomplished through the intervention of the ordinary minister of health and nourishment. But if no prophet had ever been commissioned to do one kind of work as well as the other, we should not have known to whom we might refer them. An infinite darkness would have rested both upon human and natural proceedings, which, except through our own fault and unwillingness to profit by God's illumination, does not rest upon them now.

Then we are told, Jezebel swore by her gods that she would make Elijah like one of those prophets whom he had slain. "And he went a day's journey into the wilderness and sat under a juniper-tree, and said, 'Lord, take now my life, for I am not better than my fathers.'" They had passed away from the earth; why was he to stay upon it in strife with all with whom he had to do, with a commission to destroy, but not, it seemed, having one friend who cared for him or could feel with him? Then food was provided for him; he found there was One who knew his wants and could satisfy them. He went in the strength of that meat towards Horeb, where God had once been heard speaking out of the midst of the fire those commandments which his people were breaking. "And he came into a cave and lodged there. And the word of the Lord came unto him and said unto him, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' And he said unto Him, 'I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword. And I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life to take it away.' And He said, 'Go forth and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by. And a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord. But the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still, small voice. And it came to pass that when Elijah heard it he went and wrapped his face in his mantle, and stood at the entering in of the cave." — 1 Kings xix. 9–13.

There are those who think that Elijah exceeded his commission when he destroyed the priests of Baal; that this was one of the self-willed acts, which the Scripture records, sometimes with no commentary but that which subsequent events supply, of its noblest heroes. I have not adopted that view of the subject. I have not seen any occasion to depart from the ordinary one. But though I do not read in this story of Elijah's deep despondency the condemnation of his last act, I do see in it the natural effects of any great exercise of destructive power — perhaps of power at all — upon the mind of him to whom it has been intrusted. The sense of exhaustion, the cry, "I am not better than my fathers," though I have done such wonders, the hopelessness of the future, becoming all the more deep from the apparently useless triumph that had been won already, — surely every prophet must have these bitter experiences if he is not to sink into a Baal-worshipper, and after all to regard the God of Truth and Righteousness merely as a God of Might. Elijah, though he wrought so many miracles, was, comparatively, still a novice when he sat down under the juniper-tree. When he left the cave he was an initiated man. He had thought that the earthquake, the fire, the wind that rent the mountains, must be the great witnesses of the Lord. But he was not in *them*. Not they; but the still, small voice had that awe in it, which forced the prophet to cover his face with his mantle. What a blessed and a beautiful conclusion of all the past history! What an interpretation of its meaning! The glaring outward signs which the priests of Jezebel sought for, were feeble; the living power which spoke to the heart within, — this only demanded and compelled reverence. He who could send bread to the woman of Zarephath was, indeed, the God who answered by fire.

And now the prophet was prepared for two lessons of deep humiliation, and therefore of unspeakable comfort. He had supposed he was alone in his witness for God. It was a thought of anguish, and yet it was a thought of pride. He felt the misery of solitude, yet there was self-exaltation in it. "I alone am left, and they seek my life." No! there are seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal. Is it so, indeed? What, Elijah the great prophet, after all, does not know more than a multitude beside! He is not more faithful than they are! God has called them as well as him. Who can tell whether Elijah could have borne that discovery a few hours before? The still, small voice had made it the most blessed of all discoveries. That voice had taught him, brethren, to care whether he was better than his fathers, or better than his brethren; to desire only that God might be glorified in his strength and in his nothingness.

This lesson referred to the present. The other concerned the future. Elisha, the son of Shaphat, and Jehu, the son of Nimshi, were to finish the work which he had left undone. He was wanted no longer; God had other men, — one of them his servant, the other a wild captain of the host, — who could bear a witness which he had not been able to bear. Was not this a message of humiliation? But was there not in it such comfort as no other could have brought? His task was over; he might leave the world in which he had fought so hard a fight, certain that it was in God's hands, and that he was, whithersoever he might go, in whatever manner he might be taken.

Once convinced of that, it signified not whether he died the most lingering death, or was carried in a whirlwind into heaven. There are those who dwell on the story of his departure as if it were worthy of more wonder and were more divine than all the events of his life. I cannot think so. I do not pretend to understand that story. I do not desire to explain it away. I receive it in all the vagueness with which the Scripture has left it surrounded, as one of the testimonies which it pleased God to bear to the old world of a truth which we receive, since Christ has risen and ascended on high, as belonging not to some special saint, but to all beings who bear the flesh which he took. And when you are disposed to dwell upon that which is peculiar in the history of Elijah, that which is not vouchsafed to us in this age, turn to these words. " And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, Jesus took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering. And behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spoke of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." There is, then, something more glorious than translation. So Elijah told the disciples; so he tells us. The death of a malefactor, the death of the cross; this, in the eyes of saints and angels, is far more glorious. This breaks down all distinctions, this exhibits the eternal Son of God uniting Himself with the weakness and the death of every creature. This makes it a shame to wish that there were any other way into the full and open presence of God, than the one which he has consecrated. And in this Cross, we see Righteousness and Wisdom and Love, triumphing over all forms of human and natural power, claiming them as the servants, claiming us as the children, of Him of whom Moses and Elijah and every prophet in the old world bore witness while they were on earth, and bear witness now in their glory.

SERMON IX.

ELISHA AND JEHU.

LINCOLN'S INN, SEPTUAGESIMA SUNDAY. — FEB. 8, 1852.

And Elisha the prophet called one of the children of the prophets, and said unto him, "Gird up thy loins, and take this box of oil in thine hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. And when thou comest thither, look out there Jehu, the son of Jehoshaphat, the son of Nimshi, and go in, and make him arise up from among his brethren, and carry him to an inner chamber. Then take the box of oil, and pour it upon his head, and say, 'Thus saith the Lord, I have anointed thee king over Israel.' Then open the door, and flee, and tarry not." — 2 KINGS ix. 1 – 3.

I NEED scarcely tell you that the phrase "children of the prophets," in this passage, indicates men who were taught by a prophet or prophets, and who might hope in due time to fulfil the office themselves, if they were not already called to it. The notion of a class of men under this kind of education is very puzzling, I apprehend, to some modern readers. "Was not the prophet," they ask, emphatically, "the inspired man? Were not his words false if they did not proceed directly from the mouth of the Lord? How could he be trained or disciplined to utter such words?" The subject is a very important one. The portion of the history at which we are now arrived, forces it upon our notice. Elijah was, in a remarkable sense, the solitary man. "I alone," he said, "am the prophet of the Lord; while the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty. I alone am left, and they seek my life." On the contrary, his successor, Elisha, is nearly always surrounded by companions, disciples, or servants. Every passage of his history makes us understand how great the influence of the previous teacher had been, how true it was that there were numbers who had not bowed the knee to Baal during his stay upon earth, how soon, according to what seems the general law in such cases, they discovered themselves after he had left it. In the particular instance of which the text speaks, a young man out of the schools goes, by the direct command of Elisha, to execute an errand which involved nothing less than the overthrow of a dynasty, and a revolution of two kingdoms.

If the main work of the prophet was to declare, that such and such an event would, or would not, come to pass, — or if he was a mere Æolian harp, from which a chance breeze drew forth certain wild and irregular, however beautiful, notes, — the idea of preparation involves an absurdity, or something worse than an absurdity. On that supposition it must mean, if it means any thing, an initiation of the scholar into certain tricks, by which his predecessors had been wont to impose upon the vulgar, or the communication to him of certain facts and principles known to them, by which he might acquire a reputation for sudden insight and discovery. No doubt such an education as this was not unknown in the old world, as it is not unknown in the modern. It is the ordinary discipline of adepts and conjurers, of those who practise upon men's fears, or upon their curiosity, of those who appeal to their consciences by religious deceptions, or to their sense of mysterious powers in the natural world by philosophical deceptions.

But the Jewish prophet, as we have found him in the Scripture records which we have gone through, was not primarily or characteristically a foreteller. The essence of his office did not lie in what he announced respecting the future, though he might speak of it very decisively and authoritatively. Nor did he seek to draw any special wonder to himself as an improviser, though he might be called upon to speak out at once on great emergencies that which had been put into his heart. But the sole power which the prophet possessed of declaring that which should be, arose from his knowledge of that which had been and which was. He meditated in the law of the Lord, and in that law did he exercise himself day and night. In this exercise he learnt what was in conformity with the law, what was contrary to it. In this exercise he learnt to believe in a Divine Teacher, and to commune with Him; to believe in Him as a permanent and continual Teacher, as the guide of his own heart; to believe that all other men's hearts were right so long as they were under the same guidance, and wrong when they were breaking loose from it. The fruits of revolt his inward monitor enabled him to foresee and to predict. The prediction might take a general form and point to a distant issue, or a number of issues; it might speak of that which was definite and immediate. There would be the same proof in both cases that the word came from a hidden source and from a moral being; a proof addressed to the conscience of the hearer, seeing that the prediction would always come forth with some warning respecting his actual conduct, some denunciation of an idolatrous or unrighteous act. Every thing, then, that was sudden in these utterances, bore witness to previous trains of thought and habits of reflection. So far from wishing to deny the existence of these, as if they interfered with the genuine-ness of his inspiration, the prophet would be grieved if his hearer did not give him credit for them. If his utterances seemed to be fortuitous, they could not bear the witness which he desired they should bear of a permanent ruler, they could not remind the listener of the deep fountain from which they had proceeded, or encourage him to ask, in wonder and awe, whether that fountain was not also in himself.

The knowledge of passing events, too, would be sought for, not declined, by the true prophet. He had no need to bandage his eyes that the spectator might be sure he derived his insight from some other source than actual observation. He might observe, he was bound to observe, whatever came before him in any way, from any quarter. All facts were to him signs of a divine purpose, solemn indications of truths which they could not themselves make known, but which nevertheless lay in the heart of them, and which God could discover to the patient and faithful seeker.

Nor can I suppose that the knowledge which the wise king is said to have possessed of trees and plants, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop upon the wall, so far as the means of obtaining it lay within their reach, would have been scorned or scouted by these men of God. They might not have had much of it; probably much less than the soothsayers and magicians of Egypt or Assyria; less perhaps of traditional information on such matters than the Phœnician priests of Jezebel's court. But what they had they would make use of; looking rather to the secret powers of things than to their outward mechanism; referring the former in all cases to the government of a personal being; believing that in many, perhaps in most cases, they were subject to man as His vicegerent.

Supposing the habitual belief and work of the prophet to have been of this kind, it does not seem very strange that he should have been an educator of others, or that one main object of his education should have been to fit them for the exercise of functions like his own. It would have been the most glaring contradiction to all his professions, if he had regarded the prophetical power as something bestowed for his honor, a gift to separate him from the rest of the people. In a prophet of Baal such an opinion would have been most natural; in a prophet of the Lord God of Israel it would have been most detestable. God had given His law to the whole nation. All were under it; therefore all might study it and delight themselves in it. It was a law which imported a government over the inner man, over the conscience and heart and will. The conscience and heart and will of every man might be awakened to know the nature of this government, to receive light from the source of light. And since light is given that it may be communicated, since it shines into a mind that it may shine forth from that mind, there was no reason why any one of the Lord's people should not be prophets. It could not indeed be taken for granted that every one would be so. He who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, might determine otherwise; He might have other work for his servant to do different from that of denouncing the sins of king or priest or people, or of revealing God's judgments and the blessings that would come out of them. But the training of the prophet would not be less suitable for those other works. It would teach the king the ground of his authority, his relations to those whom he governed, his responsibility for the government of them. It would teach the elders of the city that they were not to obey the commands of an evil woman, when she told them to charge an innocent man with blaspheming God and the king that she might get possession of his inheritance. It would teach the priests that they were not to pollute the sacrifices of God, or offer them to devils and not to Him. It would teach the owners of the land, that the land was held by them of Him who had committed it to them in trust for the good of His whole people. It would teach the seller the sin of having the false measure and the bag of deceitful weights. It would teach the master the sin of oppressing the hireling in his wages. It would teach all, that they were the members of one commonwealth, over which a higher than Ahab or Jehoram was ruling, and who could and would set aside their rule to assert his own.

The sons of the prophets, then, were a continual witness to the Israelites against certain errors into which they were apt to fall respecting the prophetical office. The man of God might have been looked upon as a mere separate being, cut off by the awfulness of his character and dignity from the rest of his countrymen; an object of distant admiration or dread, not an example of what they ought to be. These men, taken from among themselves and associated with him, declared that he was only withdrawn from their communion that he might the better claim privileges for them which they were in hazard of losing; that he was only chosen out by the Lord God of Israel, that he might the more clearly understand, and help them to understand, their national calling. If he did any strange acts, or put forth any marvellous powers, the people would see that they were exercised, not in his own name, but in the name of the Lord God; not for his sake, but for theirs; since some very humble person, scarcely distinguished by a name, known only as one of an order, could perform some of the most important and perilous tasks which were committed to his master. If the sons of the prophets were intrusted with messages like that which one of them bore to Jehu, a proof would be given that the prophet was merely declaring and carrying out a purpose which must be accomplished; he did not go himself to plot against an existing order, or to earn the favor of some particular chieftain.

The repeated allusions to these sons of the prophets, in the story of Elisha, are specially worthy of note, because there are more passages in that story which favor the notion that the man of God is a worker of prodigies and portents, than in all the rest of the Bible. I do not mean that there is any great number of those stories. Open at hazard the life of almost any conspicuous saint in the Middle Ages, and you will find five miracles attributed to him for one that is given to Elisha. Of those that are given to him, the greater part are of the same character with those which we have considered hitherto. He teaches the Syrian leper that there is a God in Israel who can deliver from plagues and restore health, as well as the more precious and humbling lesson, that a prophet does not work by enchantments; that a man cannot purchase the mercy and favor of God by great acts and sacrifices; that a simple word, simply obeyed, carries with it a power which does not lie in Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, no, nor in Jordan, the river of Palestine. Elisha testifies that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, when he sets before a hundred men twenty loaves of bread. He signifies that there are instruments, and those natural instruments, which by the power of God may remove the effects of poison and heal the springs of waters. Finally, he raises the son of the Shunammite woman to life; the story of this raising being no mere repetition of that which is ascribed to his master, but one full of distinct and living incidents, suggesting far more to the heart respecting the love of God, and the way in which He uses His creatures as the ministers of His love, than it suggests to the understanding respecting the peculiar gifts of Elisha. This, I say, is the *general* character of these records, and the more strong one's apprehension is of the degradation of the Israelitish people at that time, of their low, sensual idolatry, of their reverence for evil powers, the more one feels how acts of this kind must have been needed to counteract their materialism, to undermine their religion of fraud and hatred, to establish, as no words or arguments could, the proof of an actual and a gracious ruler.

But there are some deeds attributed to Elisha, I allude especially to the cursing of the children at Bethel, of which I have never heard any explanation that seemed to me satisfactory. It is easy to dispose of such narratives by saying that they accord with the character of the Old Testament, though not of the New; but as I have not availed myself of that plea in other cases, I cannot in this. The old dispensation, I believe, reveals the same God as the new; less perfectly, no doubt, oftentimes through clouds which the risen sun has scattered, but a God exhibiting righteousness, mercy, truth; demanding them of his creatures; cultivating them in all who submit themselves to Him and acknowledge Him as their Lord. Nor can I merely resolve the difficulty by telling you, that, if you accept the Bible as the word of God, you must take each passage of it as part of the whole, without asking any questions. The Bible itself forces us to ask a multitude of questions. Because I receive it as a revelation of God, I am bound to ask what it reveals concerning God. Because I receive it as a whole book, as a continuous revelation, I am bound to ask how one part of it accords with and interprets another. We must not fear to make this demand. It is distrusting the Bible, distrusting God, to have such a fear. And when we have not found the answer in any special instance, we should say so frankly. It cannot shake our faith to feel such ignorance and to confess it. If there were a hundred passages which I was unable to interpret, but which puzzled me as to their moral significance, I should believe in the God whom the rest revealed to me, and ask Him to instruct me what I should think of them. And this I believe in good time He would do, if I did not lose my hold upon that which I had, or attempt by hasty efforts of my own to grasp that which I had not. A man who takes this course is, I believe, in an infinitely safer moral condition, and shows far more reverence for the Bible, than one who takes the whole book nominally upon trust or upon evidence, and does not care what the contents of it are, does not strive to bring them into connection with himself, does not desire to understand from them what God is.

This story, however, is not one of a number which I find it hard to reconcile with the general teaching of the book. I do not know that there is another in which I perceive the same difficulty. And for that very reason, instead of passing it over, or offering some solution of it, or, on the other hand, pronouncing it an interpolation, when I have no proof to offer that it is one, I think it is a plain duty to profess that I do not understand it, though better persons may. And I do so the more readily, because there are some who, it seems to me, interpret *this* passage with great readiness and decision, but utterly fail of explaining the rest of

Elisha's life, or the life of any other man of God whom the Bible speaks of. The right of a prophet in the old time to curse grown men or children, the right of preachers and priests in this day to imitate him, they perfectly apprehend. It is only when the prophet comes forth as a healer, a restorer, a life-giver, that he seems to be fulfilling a function uncongenial to their taste, and which should be limited to his own time. When he appears to be asserting the dignity of his own person, or at all events of his own office, by a malediction, their spirits are in harmony with his; they can recognize his stern justice. When he bears witness against idolatry and wrong-doing in the kings or priests, his glory seems to depart; those who chose him for their model before, prefer then to copy the men whom he threatened with the Divine retribution.

That retribution is the main subject of the Scripture narrative. Elijah had told Ahab that the blood of Naboth would be required of his house. His humiliation delayed the sentence. His enemy, who had found him out, seems thenceforth to have left him alone. Perhaps the great prophet passed the remainder of his own days in peace. But there were other prophets to torment Ahab, and a still greater number, freshly brought perhaps by Jezebel from her own land, to deceive him. The lying spirit in their mouths drove him to Ramoth Gilead, and Israel was left, as Micah had foretold, without a shepherd. His son Joram finds Elisha almost as terrible as his master had been to Ahab. Yet their relations were different. Joram is less of a Baal-worshipper than his father. He consults Elisha; is asked by him why he does not go to the prophets of his father and mother; still is promised deliverance and victory in a war which he has undertaken with the Moabites, and is saved, not once or twice, by the prophet's knowledge, from the Syrians. These enemies of Israel look upon the prophet with especial dread. Once he is surrounded by them; but his servant is permitted to see invisible hosts which are on his side. These visions, Elisha's acts of power, his words of wisdom, the ruin which threatened the land from the Syrians, its unexpected rescue, are all signs that the God who had made a covenant with their fathers was with the king and the people then. Trust was then, as always, what the prophets demanded of them. They could not trust too boldly or unreservedly. To trust would have been to repent of the calf-worship, to rise out of the brutal habits which it had engendered, to begin a new life as men. But the custom of idolatry had destroyed trust in their hearts. They could only worship and tremble. The sin of the father descended upon the son, with the weakness and cowardice, which were the fruits of it, increased tenfold. At the appointed day and hour, the vengeance came, by just such an instrument as would seem likeliest to carry it out.

Jehu the son of Nimshi had been declared to Elijah as the joint successor with Elisha in the work that he had left unperformed. No two men in Israel could have been more unlike. One cried to have a double portion of his master's spirit; the other was known only as the man who drove furiously. Yet Jehu had the kind of faith which might be expected in a soldier, somewhat reckless, but with his sense of right not quenched by religious falsehood. He had heard the burden which Elijah had pronounced on Ahab as he sat with him in his chariot when they entered the plot of ground that had been Naboth's. He felt that there was an everlasting truth in the sentence and that it must come to pass. Who should execute it he did not know then. When the anointing oil of Elisha's messenger had been poured on his head, and his comrades had cried, "Jehu is king," all the savage impulses of the soldier became quickened and elevated by the feeling that he was commissioned to punish evil-doers and assert justice. Esteeming himself a scourge of God, and rejoicing in the office, he gives full play to all his bloody instincts. He murders two kings, commands Jezebel to be thrown out of a window, treads her under foot, then eats and drinks. He looks with delight at the heads of the seventy royal children who were slain at his bidding by the elders of Jezreel; he puts forty-two men to death whom he meets coming into Samaria; he leaves not one living of the house of Ahab. Finally, he lays a plot for the worshippers of Baal, calls them to hold a feast to their god, and commands that none shall leave the house in which he has shut them up alive.

It causes great scandal to many amiable and worthy people, that the Scripture does not stop to comment on these atrocities of Jehu, but appears to commend his zeal and to rejoice that what he began he accomplished. I believe, brethren, that a true portrait can never be a mischievous one, and that this is essentially true. Nothing is said to gloss over the ferocity of Jehu; it is exhibited broadly, nakedly; you do not want words to tell you that you must hate it; your impulse, and it is a right one, is to do so. But there may be in the most ruffianly and brutal characters, not merely strength, not merely a clear, distinct purpose, and a steadiness in following it out, — qualities worthy of all admiration, wheresoever and in whomsoever they are found, — but along with these an intense hatred of hypocrisy, a determination to put it down, not for selfish ends, but because it is hateful; which determination is good and inspired by God. The Scripture teaches us to confess this, and by so doing clears, not confuses, all our ethical conceptions and judgments. We do meet with these characters in the world, — characters with something devilish lying close beside something which is really divine. And though the devilish is the obtrusive, and may become the pervading part of the man's soul, you cannot help feeling that the other is in the very depth of it, and marks out what he is meant to be and can be. Honor it; confess that it is not of earthly origin; that it does not spring from any dark root in the selfish nature. Say boldly, "That honesty, that zeal, is from above; it has the sign of a celestial parentage; just so far as that governs him, he will be a servant of his kind; after times will bless him." But it is also true, that the grovelling elements of his character, if they are not destroyed by this nobler fire, will only glare the more fiercely for the light which it sheds upon them, and that soon, when the fire begins to burn low, you will see, instead of that glare, nothing but dull, smouldering ashes.

"Jehu," says the Scripture, "took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord." It is in the quiet time that a man is tested. Then we find out, not only what he can do, but what he is; whether his zeal for righteousness means that he will obey it; whether his hatred for what is false implies an adherence to the true. The test in this case failed. Jehu had destroyed Baal-worship, for that was foreign. He clave to the calf-worship, for that was the tradition of his fathers. And therefore the people went on in the downward course. They had swept away the house of Ahab. But the disease of that house had hold of their vitals. They sought after evil powers; they could not trust God.

Elisha the son of Shaphat and Jehu the son of Nimshi did then carry out together the words of the prophet. For those words depended upon no mortal agency; they were the expressions of an eternal law, which in some way or other would fulfil itself. This is the great lesson which the Bible teaches in every page. The righteous Will moves on steadily and irresistibly towards its own end; the unrighteous will struggles with it; seems to prevail; is broken in pieces. But seeing that it is *Will*, and not a blind necessity, which rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of men, it is all important whether those who execute its decrees work in cheerful submission to it, or in blindness, with base and private designs. This was the great question for the ministers of God's purpose, whether they were prophets or soldiers, to consider then; it is the great question for us now. We may be sure that at the last, by our evil doings and the fruits of them, if not by our zeal for that which is sincerely good, we shall help to demonstrate the existence of a divine order in the world, and shall foretell its victory. But it is for us to say in which way we shall perform the Divine commission. If we come to no decision, the gravitation of our nature to the earth decides for us. We become sensualists and idolaters on a greater or smaller scale. We execute our trust as Ahab and Joram executed theirs; whatever is the traditional conception of our time we fall into and embrace; when that is worn out we go in search of some external novelty. But between the mere selfish idolater and the faithful man, there is, we have seen, an intermediate type of character, which many a devotee, many a one whom God would make a champion of His own, too easily admires and adopts. Zeal is so precious a gift, is so much wanted for the service of mankind, it is so rare, that the evil spirit is certain to assault those who possess it, and will not leave them till he has worked hard to make a precious trust from God into his own instrument. And seeing that there are a multitude of kindly compromising men in the world, who represent all energetic indignation against wrong as unnecessary, disturbing, unphilosophical, unchristian, those who believe that no form of falsehood is to be tolerated, but to be abhorred, who are convinced that good men exist to protest against evil, who remember that He who was meek and lowly made a scourge of small cords to drive the money-getters out of His Father's house, and that he denounced Scribes and Pharisees as hypocrites, — men, I say, with these strong persuasions and lively recollections, are stirred up, by the indifference which others exhibit and boast of, to a kind of savageness and fury. They must make their voices heard in the streets, they must, if they can, hasten on the purposes of God, and themselves execute part of His wrath. Alas! what are they striving for? "It is the driving of Jehu, for he driveth furiously," — this is the best memorial that will remain of him who has let his zeal become his master when it was meant to be his servant, and who has counted it a pleasure, instead of a hard necessity, to destroy. "O my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," — these were the words which a king of Israel of Jehu's house spoke to Elisha as *he* lay sick and dying. He felt that a power was passing out of the world which was greater than his, and than that of all the kings who had been before him, because it was power, which — doubtless amidst innumerable confusions and errors, a thousand self-willed efforts and self-confidences — had yet in the main been consecrated to the God of truth and meekness, had been used in conformity with His mind, and therefore had spread health and peace around it. Was it better to kill the seventy sons of Ahab, or to bring up sons of the prophets? to be the executor of God's vengeance on the land, or to show that He was the healer of its sicknesses? to make it clear that Death is the certain wages of sin, or to affirm by acts and words that there is One who raiseth the dead? Which mission was the nobler in the old time? Which must be nobler for those who believe that God gave His only begotten Son, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved?

SERMON X.

THE SHEPHERD PROPHET.

LINCOLN'S INN, SEXAGESIMA SUNDAY. — FEB. 15, 1852.

> Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to Jeroboam, king of Israel, saying, " Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words. For thus Amos saith: 'Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of their own land.' Also Amaziah said unto Amos, " O thou seer, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there. But prophesy not again any more in Bethel, for it is the king's court and the king's chapel." Then answered Amos, and said to Amaziah, " I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son. But I was an herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit. And the Lord took me as I followed the flock, and the Lord said unto me, 'Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.' " — AMOS vii. 10 – 15.

THE Jeroboam spoken of in this passage was the fourth king of the house of Jehu. From the time of Jehu, we hear of the Syrians under Hazael as the great oppressors of the Samaritan kingdom. " In those days," (that is, before the death of Jehu,) it is said, " the Lord began to cut Israel short; and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel." — 2 Kings x. 32. So of his son Jehoahaz it is recorded, " He followed the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and He delivered them into the hand of Hazael, king of Syria, and into the hand of Ben-hadad, the son of Hazael, all their days. And Jehoahaz besought the

Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him, for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them. And the Lord gave Israel a saviour, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians. And the children of Israel dwelt in their tents as beforetime." — ch. xiii. The country had then been reduced to a state of extreme weakness. "The king of Syria," it is said, "had left of the people to Jehoahaz but fifty horsemen and ten chariots and ten thousand footmen; for he had destroyed them, and had made them like the dust by threshing." From that time began a revival in the outward prosperity, though not in the internal condition, of the people. "Jehoash did evil in the sight of the Lord"; but he took out of the hand of Ben-hadad the cities which Hazael had taken out of the hand of his father. "Three times did Jehoash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel." His son Jeroboam was still more successful. He is said to have restored the coasts of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain. His reign of forty-one years must have been one of rare, and to the Israelites most unlooked for felicity, which would be felt in proportion to their previous depression and ignominy. Yet of him also it is said, that "he departed not from the sins of the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."

The victories of Jeroboam are said in the 2 Kings xiv. 25, to have "fulfilled the word of the Lord God of Israel, which He spake by the word of His servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gath-Hepher." Why, or when, or to whom, this prophecy was delivered, we have no means of knowing. Nothing further is said of Jonah in the history. The book in the canon of the Old Testament which bears his name does not touch upon the condition of the kings or people of Israel. Though it records a passage in the life of Jonah, it does not purport to be written by him. I reserve it for a later part of this course, when the people to whom it refers will have become closely identified with our subject.

Very different is the case with the prophet Amos. Though he is not mentioned in the book of Kings, his own express language connects him with the period of which we are speaking, as well as with the previous and subsequent history of the ten tribes. He did not, however, belong to them. He was a herdsman of Tekoa, a plain country situated in the south of Judea. The words of Amaziah, Jeroboam's priest, intimate that he was an intruder, one who might prophesy and eat bread in Judea if he pleased, but who had no business in Bethel near the king's house and the king's chapel. The answer of Amos gives us a glimpse into his own life, and throws much light on the character of his book. "I was not a prophet," he says, "or the son of a prophet"; that is to say, I was no recognized member of the order, was attached to no school. "I was an herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." One of that class to which Abraham and Moses and David had belonged; but not rich in fields and herds, in men-servants or maid-servants, like the first; nor learned in the wisdom of the Egyptians, like the second; nor with any, the most distant intimation, that he might one day be the shepherd of a people, like the third. He was a laboring man, familiar, as all his words indicate, with the forms and appearances of nature, with the common operations of husbandry, with the special tasks of the keeper of flocks, with the wrongs and sufferings of the poor. Being such a one, he says, "the Lord took me as I followed the flock. And the Lord said unto me, 'Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.'" An overpowering influence drove him from the quiet plains of Judea into the other kingdom, not upon any errand that had to do with his own herds, not into the country districts, where he might have found men of congenial occupation, but straight to the place where the first king had set up the calf for the people to worship, and where the present king had chosen his summer dwelling.

Amos therefore exhibits a different aspect of the prophetical office from that which we considered last Sunday. I said then, that there was nothing at all inconsistent with the inspiration of the prophet in his becoming the member of a guild or college, or in his being the subject of an education. The present instance shows us with equal clearness, that a man might be conscious of a most distinct calling to a distinct work, who had not this formal preparation for it. Not that he, any more than Elisha or those who called Elisha master, was without a training or discipline; not that he, any more than they, corresponded to that notion of an impromptu speaker, which we sometimes attach to the name of prophet. A poet of our own has taught us what wisdom an ordinary English shepherd may acquire from the daily sights which he sees and the daily tasks which he performs.

> "Fields where with cheerful spirits he had breathed
> The common air; the hills which he so oft
> Had climbed with vigorous steps; which had impressed
> So many incidents upon his mind
> Of hardship, skill or courage, joy or fear,
> Which like a book preserved the memory
> Of the dumb animals whom he had saved,
> Had fed, or sheltered, linking to such acts,
> So grateful in themselves, the certainty
> Of honorable gain; these fields, these hills,
> Which were his living being even more
> Than his own blood, what could they less, had laid
> Strong hold on his affections, were to him
> A pleasurable feeling of blind love,
> The pleasure which there is in life itself."

A homely description certainly, without the slightest exaggeration; rather below than above what one might fairly affirm of any manly dweller on our soil, whose mind was not debased by crime, or specially elevated by devotion. But now, if one added to this, in the case of a Jewish shepherd, the belief that he was actually the heir of a covenant made with his fathers and himself; the conviction, that every thought of his heart, which was not dark or evil, must have come from the Giver of all good and perfect gifts; the assurance that every sound in nature was in some way the utterance of His voice, and announced something of His will; the confidence, stronger than that the sun would rise on the morrow, that His will must be accomplished; connect these, the ordinary teachings of the law to every Israelite, with the shepherd life of Amos, and you will feel that he may have been in a school of the prophets, though he did not know it himself, and thought he was intended chiefly to be a gatherer of sycamore fruit. Remember, also, that none of the most vulgar temptations of the English shepherd were wanting to him; that if he had a power drawing him up, there was the same mighty tendency downwards which there is in any peasant or noble of any age. Remember that the conflict between these opposing powers in any man is great in proportion to his desire that the better may triumph; and you will not fancy, that, because he was away from cities, he was not learning much of what passes in the hearts of those who dwell in them, much of which those hearts are generally unconscious. The school may not have been an easy one; there may have been severe chastisement in it, as well as much learning; no little intercourse with men, even though it was carried on for the most part in solitude. If we suppose reports to have reached this lonely shepherd of acts which were done in the city of David, the city where the holy temple stood, or if we suppose him to have travelled thither to some Passover or Pentecost and to have seen with his eyes what kind of worship was going on in that temple, what kind of interest the people took in the daily sacrifices or the solemn yearly feasts, how far they were better in their daily conduct, in their dealings with each other, either for the common or the more rare service, we may believe that he would have an abundance of materials for his musing as he sat watching his sheep in the evening twilight or in the early dawn. And if then, when he was lamenting how the house of David had forgotten the God of their father, he heard of the fierce war which one of that house had commenced against the tribes of Israel, and of his discomfiture, we can imagine how he would brood over the divisions of a land, every portion of which was included in the promise, all the citizens of which were descended from those whom God had brought with eagle's wings out of Egypt that they might be a people for himself. One people, one God; the thoughts would be inseparable in the shepherd's mind. But have they one God? The calves of Bethel and Dan would rise up in awful vision before him; that great parent sin which had suggested itself to the mind of the first Jeroboam for the purpose of keeping the nation asunder, which had gone on corrupting and dividing his own people ever since. The prophet may have heard of the success which had blessed the arms of the reigning king; surely, he will have said, they must see God's hand in that. Who could tell but Jeroboam and his people might repent even then; that their prosperity might do for them what adversity had not been able to do? A call to them might resound in Judea also; each kingdom might turn again to its true King, and avert the doom which otherwise could not be far off.

To suppose such thoughts as these stirring in the shepherd's mind, is not — (I must urge this observation upon you again and again) — to suppose that he was obeying certain impulses and reflections of his own, when he set forth on his journey to Samaria. Such thoughts he knew and felt had come, not from himself, but from God. He may have resisted the conclusion long: indolence, diffidence, the sense of his ignorance, his delight in the quiet life of the shepherd, the dread of cities, must all have worked mightily in him, and persuaded him to think that the voice proceeded from some other than the Lord of his heart and that he might safely neglect it. Then a sense of this rebellion of his flesh against the conviction of his mind would be new and strong evidence that he was meant to go; it would be a test of the power of the Spirit, which was forcing him on in spite of such obstacles, which was fighting with his selfish inclination, and stirring him to the last work which he would have chosen for himself.

There is something very wonderful, and at the same time most natural, in the expansion of mind which a man brought up as Amos was, acquires when he has been raised out of himself and has been made to understand the glory and the guilt of his country. At first, when you open his prophecy, you might fancy that you had got beyond the confines of Israel and Israelitish feeling altogether; for he speaks of Damascus, of Gaza, of Tyrus, of Edom, of Ammon, of Moab; and then comes to the two kingdoms of the chosen people, as if they were included in this circle of nations and were subject to the same laws with them. When you look further into "the words which he saw" (and they are words which one *sees*, they must have risen up before him like actual visions to the eye), when one looks more into these words, this first impression does not disappear. He declares that for two, or three, or four transgressions, God will visit each of these lands. And the transgressions are all of the same quality; they are outrages upon a law of brotherhood which is assumed to subsist between nations. Damascus has threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron; Tyre and Gaza have delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, that is to say, have sold to Edomites the captives whom they took in war, not remembering the brotherly covenant; Edom has pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and kept his wrath for ever; Ammon has ripped up the women with child of Gilead that they might enlarge their border; Moab has burnt the bones of the king of Edom in the lime. Let it always be observed that, in the last case at all events, the crime has no reference whatever to the countrymen of Amos. It has been committed against the bitterest enemy which Israel has. Nevertheless it is a hateful and horrible act, which is denounced upon the same ground on which the persevering hatred of the children of Esau against the children of Jacob from generation to generation is also denounced. And when we come to the three and the four transgressions which are imputed to Judah and Israel, we discover no patriotic tolerance, no wish to prove that the people of the covenant, though evil, are less evil, or will be less punished, than their neighbors. "Judah has despised the law of God, and has not kept His commandments, and their lies have caused them to err, after the which their fathers walked." The charges against the other kingdom are more directly and obviously of the same character with those which we heard of before; only they are proclaimed with greater indignation. "They sell the righteous for silver and the poor for a pair of shoes; they turn aside the way of the meek." Other gross moral abominations are attributed to them; but he does not yet speak of the special sin of idolatry. A fact I conceive very notable, and which may go far to confute the notion, that the indignation of the prophets against the kings of Israel arose from some passionate adherence to an old patriarchal tradition. Inhumanities and brutalities are what Amos charges upon the ten tribes. Unquestionably he believed that these were the effects of their denial of a righteous Being; but he does not declare that the root will be destroyed, till he has shown that the fruits are accursed, such as the conscience of those who kneeled to the calves and patronized the worship of them must have condemned.

Amos is sure that the like causes must produce the like effects. "The height of the Amorite was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong like the oaks. Yet I destroyed his fruit from above and his roots from beneath. Also I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and led you for forty years through the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite." The history of the past had been testifying that men who did not like to retain God in their knowledge, who chose to be evil and to do evil, would be cast out, let them be as strong and rooted as they might. Had that law been changed? True, God had chosen the sons of Jacob from all the families of the earth that they might know His Name; He had given them prophets to tell them of His Name, Nazarites, to testify that they were separated to the invisible God. But if they said to the prophets, "Prophesy not," if they destroyed the separation of the Nazarites, what would follow? They would fall as the Amorite fell. "Then the flight shall perish from the swift, and neither shall he stand that handleth the bow, neither he that is swift of foot, nor he that rideth the horse, shall deliver himself."

What particular oppressor was destined to punish Israel, Amos does not intimate. But he has a clear apprehension that some great power will be appointed to do this work. It is not Syria; that has had its day and Jeroboam has triumphed over it; its own punishment is at hand. It is some empire which will swallow up one and another of these little nations. We shall hear its name in due time. It will form the subject of a whole body of prophecy. As yet we only see it at a distance, a dark, indefinite shadow; to the ordinary observer, a cloud no bigger than a hand. Amos has no greater knowledge of the Assyrian monarchy than his contemporaries; he has heard of it, perhaps, but only heard of it. His anticipations of what is coming rest upon other grounds than any calculations of its might, or of the probability that it will aim at conquests.

"You only, saith the Lord, have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish your iniquities." The covenant that I have made with you is a covenant to do this, "for two cannot walk together except they be agreed." If you separate from Me, I must seek, by punishments, to bring you back. And are there not signs that I purpose to do this? When you hear a lion roaring in the forest, you are sure that he has taken prey. When a trumpet is blown in the city, the people are affrighted. And must not you conclude, when you see any calamity in a land, that God is uttering His voice there? His prophets come to declare what that voice signifies. He makes them understand what He is doing and why He is doing it, that they may tell you. Let all the nations then know, let Ashdod and the palaces of Egypt know, that there are tumults and oppressions in the midst of Samaria. These oppressions and tumults invite the surrounding people to assemble; a guilty and an oppressive land is ready for the spoiler. There is violence and robbery in your palaces, therefore you know not to do right. You have reverenced power more than right, therefore a greater power than your own will come upon you, an adversary round about the land will bring down thy strength. And in that day, the altars of Bethel, where you worship your God of brute power, shall fall to the ground. And with that altar "I will smite the winter-house with the summer-house, and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the Lord." Then in broad, shepherd language, he addresses the women of the land as the kine of Bashan, in the mountain of Samaria, who for the sake of their own luxuries excite their husbands to crush the poor and oppress the needy. And he tells them that the Lord God hath sworn by His holiness, that He will draw them and their posterity with hooks; a comparison which, whether those who heard it understood it or not, was very intelligible to the next generation, who felt the sharp hook of the Assyrian in their jaws, dragging them to a land which was not theirs.

In the next discourse to the Israelites, (or, if you please, in the next division of his poem, for though these words must have come from the prophet's lips, they may afterwards have been put together in a different form when he had delivered his message and returned to his own land,) Amos invites the people to go up to Bethel and transgress, to bring their sacrifices every morning and their tithes every three years, "for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel." That is to say, he exhorts them, as Elijah had exhorted the priests of Baal, to try what they can do with their petitions and their offerings; whether they can win rain from Heaven, or avert any calamities from their land. "All this time, saith the Lord, I have given you want of bread in your cities, yet ye have not returned to me. I have withholden the rain from you, yet ye have not returned to Me. I have smitten you with blasting and mildew, yet ye have not returned to Me. I have sent among you the pestilence, and your young men I have slain with the sword, yet ye have not returned to Me." While you have been engaged in all these religious services to win what you could not win from a reluctant idol, I have been reminding you of my invisible presence, of my power; I have been calling you through suffering to remember One who is near you, and who cares for you. "Therefore I will do thus unto thee, O Israel. Therefore prepare to meet thy God. For, lo, He that formeth the mountains and createth the wind, and declares unto man his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, who treadeth upon the high places of the earth, the Lord, the God of Hosts, is His name." A mighty utterance surely of this name, to burst from a poor shepherd's lips. But it came from the innermost depth of that shepherd's heart. He knew that he was speaking of one who was true, and in whom was no lie; he knew that he was testifying against lies; he knew that the whole universe, and the consciences of those who heard him, however they might turn away from him or persecute him, were on his side, and were acknowledging his sentence to have issued from the mouth of the Lord himself.

The thought in this passage is continued into the next. In the midst of all the seeming good fortune of the house of Jeroboam, Amos declares, that "the virgin of Israel is fallen, that she is forsaken in her land, that there is none to raise her up." It seemed an absurd contradiction of appearances to say so. One can conceive how ridiculous such words must have sounded in the ears of the priests of the king's court and chapel.

But here was the warrant for the prediction. "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly. Forasmuch, then, as your treading is on the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat, ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins. They afflict the just; they take a bribe; and they turn away the poor in the gate from their right. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time, for it is an evil time." An evil time, though it had all the semblance of being a time of wonderful improvement, of unparalleled security; an evil time, because men could not bear to hear the truth, and be told what was wrong in them, because a man was less precious in their eyes than that which he could produce, or could sell for; because worth was measured by an altogether capricious and false standard. Such a time was, inwardly, hollow, and its hollowness would be made manifest. There would come a day of the Lord; some great, startling event which would show the thing as it was, which would remove the paint that had disguised the wrinkled, withered countenance. There were some, it seems, in Samaria, who anticipated such a day of the Lord. They were very diligent in their fast days, and solemn assemblies; possibly, they had kept themselves from the outward idolatry of the court; they had preserved some of the traditions of their fathers, and a punctilious outward morality. Such men would congratulate themselves that a judgment day was at hand, which would separate between them and their less godly countrymen, which would reward them for all their painful services, while the careless evil-doers endured their deserved punishment. This loveless self-righteousness Amos evidently regards as one of the worst features of the time. "Woe unto you," he says, "that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you? The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light, even very dark, and no brightness in it? I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings, and your meat offerings, I will not accept them. Neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take then away from me the noise of thy songs, for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgment run down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." Thus the prophet spoke to those who, instead of claiming God's covenant with Israel, and warning their countrymen how they forgot it, stood on their own faith, or their own good deeds, and tried to make out a case for themselves. If they would not take up their place as Israelites, they must at least share the punishment of Israelites. For, in truth, were they better men than those they despised? Were they more worshippers of God, because they merely clung to the forms of their forefathers? Alas! no. Their forefathers in the wilderness had not really believed in the God who delivered them, had not trusted in the God of righteousness. While kneeling at His altar, while using His holy name, they were really bearing the tabernacle of Moloch and Chiun, the star of their god whom they made to themselves. And their descendants and professed imitators were doing the same. "Therefore must they go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the Lord, whose name is the Lord of Hosts."

Amos had hinted very often at this captivity. He has now openly pronounced the word; still without alluding distinctly to the nation that should carry them away. But so sure is he of the fact, that he turns at once to those "that are at ease in Zion, who put far away the evil day, who lie upon beds of ivory, who stretch themselves upon their couches, who eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall, who chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the chief ointments." He turns to these and exhorts them to think of the changes that had happened within their own recollection, almost under their own eyes, in lands as prosperous as theirs, whose border a little while before had been larger than theirs. And then, having shown them that there was nothing strange or unreasonable in his warnings, he goes into particulars, as all great poets and true prophets do; not merely denouncing captivity in vague phrases, but bringing the circumstances and incidents of it vividly before them. The city is delivered up, and all that is therein, to an invading host; pestilence follows in the train of war. If there happen to remain ten men in one house who have escaped the one calamity, they will die by the other. One shall come to seek for the bones of a kinsman to burn them; "he shall ask him that is at the side of the house, Is there any yet with thee? And he shall answer, No." And the man bids him hold his peace, lest in some wild exclamation he should utter the name of the Lord, and so bring some fresh terror upon them. As powerful a picture certainly of the results of devil-worship as was ever presented in language; yet not more fearful than true. Men may come to think of the Name of the Lord God as a mere name of horror, which they dare not pronounce, lest He should destroy them. And yet, unless all the laws of nature could be altered, unless horses could run upon the rocks, or you could plough on them with oxen, such judgments could not be averted from an evil and impenitent nation. Those who have turned judgment into gall, and the fruits of righteousness into hemlock, which rejoice in a thing of naught, and say, "Have we not taken unto us horns by our own strength," will find a nation stronger than themselves to punish them. "The Lord, the God of Hosts, saith, I will raise up such a one against you, O House of Israel."

Three images are then presented to the prophet's mind, — two of them, at least, to his eyes. The grasshoppers in the autumn seem about to destroy the whole grass of the land; a loss the more terrible, because the king has claimed the first crop for himself. Next he sees the summer heat burning up the meadows. He prays that each of these judgments may be averted; and the prayer is granted. But though these preparatory punishments, arising through the selfishness of the rulers, or the neglect of husbandry among the people, do not come, or are mitigated, Amos sees another vision, which signifies to him, that the high places of Isaac shall be desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel laid waste, and that God would rise against the house of Jeroboam with a sword.

These were some of the words which the priest of Bethel said that the land was not able to bear. One of the ablest of modern commentators supposes that Amos yielded immediately to the order that he should return into Judah, leaving behind him the fearful sentence upon Amaziah which is contained in the last verse of the seventh chapter, and that upon Israel contained in the first three verses of the eighth chapter: this being suggested by the vision of the basket of summer fruits. Then being once more in his own country, he meditates on the last fearful calamity which can overtake a people given up to gain; "a people who swallow up the needy and make the poor of the people to fail; who long for the feast to be over that they may sell corn, and the Sabbath that they may set forth wheat; making the ephah small and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit, that they may buy the poor for silver, yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat." For such a people he predicts a more fearful famine than one of bread; a famine of the word of the Lord. To hear of a God of mercy and righteousness was an intolerable thing in the days of their plenty. The thought of such a Being troubled them in their self-indulgence and indifference to others. They would fain silence the prophets who said to them, "He lives, and reigns. He is your Judge. If you will trust Him you will find Him your Deliverer." In death and dreariness, in exile from the land of their fathers, crushed by oppressors, hearing only of gods more cruel than those who make them, how will they hunger and thirst for any tidings of one who cares for the weary and heavy laden, one who would have man-servant and maid, the cattle and the stranger within the gates to rest, as well as the prince; of one who had fixed the year of jubilee, that the debtor might be released and the captive go free. O, what longing in a land of bondage to hear of such a Being; to believe that all that had been told of him in former days was not a dream; to have a right to tell their children that it was true for them! And oh! to think of the sentence going forth, It cannot be; "they have chosen their idols; they have sworn by the sin of Samaria, and said, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; they shall fall, and not rise up again.';

The spirit of the prophet seems to have reached the lowest point of depression. For we find that there may be depths in captivity below the captivity itself; a moral abyss more fearful to look into than all its physical evil. He does not pass by one or the other; he faces them all. There seems no escape for the doomed people in earth or sea, in heaven or hell; the eternal law has gone forth against them; it cannot be repealed. For is not the law His "who buildeth His stories in the heaven, and has founded His troop in the earth; He that calleth the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth. The Lord is His Name."

Yes! The Lord is His Name, — and therefore Truth and Good must be maintained, Falsehood and Evil must fall. Because it is so there is still a lower depth beneath that which seemed to be unfathomable. "Lo," thus the shepherd of Tekoa winds up his prophecy, "Lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations like as corn is sifted in a sieve. Yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth. All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword which say, 'The evil shall not overtake or prevent us.' In that day will I raise up the Tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof, and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old. That they may possess the remnant of Edom and of all the heathen which are called by My name, saith the Lord that doeth this. Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed, and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel, and they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them, and they shall plant vineyards and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon the land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of the land which I have given them, saith the Lord."

Does it seem to you that a hope so confident as this, — a hope of life arising out of death, light out of darkness, — is inconsistent with that vision of utter ruin which rose up a moment ago before us? Brethren, we shall not know the heart of the Jewish prophet, — we shall not know our own, — till we learn to see not only how these things are compatible, but why they are inseparable. Amos would not have left his sheepfolds to denounce the idolatries of Israel, if he had not felt that men, that his own countrymen, were maintaining a fearful fight against a Will which had a right to govern them, and which could alone govern them for their good. He could not have been sustained in the witness which he bore, if an ever-brightening revelation of the Perfect Goodness — of that Goodness, active, energetic, converting all powers and influences to its own righteous and gracious purposes — had not accompanied revelations that became every moment more awful, of the selfishness and disorder to which men were yielding themselves. From the observation of this strife, as history and experience present it to the mind of a man, earnestly loving his fellow-creatures, there come forth only the most fearful and despairing auguries. It is precisely because he has not only experience and history to guide him, but the certainty of an Eternal God, present in all the convulsions of society, never ceasing to act upon the individual heart when it is most wrapped in the folds of its pride and selfishness, — it is precisely because he finds this to be true, whatever else is false, that he must hope. And oftentimes, when his hope for himself is wellnigh gone, it is renewed as he thinks of what God has done for his race, and is doing for it. This is no solitary experience of a single herdsman or prophet. Through the whole Epistle to the Romans, St. Paul had been tracing out the sin of his countrymen; their rejection of the perfect Deliverer for themselves, their refusal of Him to the Heathens; their desire to wrap themselves in a righteousness which would prove itself to be the very contrary of God's righteousness. He had seen and declared that the fruit of these sins would be the utter excision of his kinsmen after the flesh from God's covenant. And yet he winds up all he has been saying in these words: "For God hath concluded all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, and who hath been His counsellor? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To whom be glory for ever. Amen."

SERMON XI.

THE VALLEY OF DECISION.

LINCOLN'S INN, QUINQUAGESIMA SUNDAY. — FEB. 22, 1852.

"In Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said, and in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." — JOEL ii. 32.

JOEL is probably an earlier prophet than Amos: I spoke of the latter first, because his message related to the revolted kingdom of Israel, and threw great light upon the history of it. Joel is strictly a prophet of Judah. He does not merely belong to the south, as Amos did; his words touch less upon the peculiar sins of the northern tribes than those of any other of the prophets previous to the Assyrian captivity. His book therefore recalls us to Mount Zion and to Jerusalem.

The broad and obvious distinction between the history of the two tribes and that of the ten is, that the hereditary succession which was so continually violated in the one, is rigidly preserved in the other. Abijam succeeds Rehoboam; Asa, Abijam; Jehoshaphat, Asa. Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, becomes connected with the house of Ahab. His son, Ahaziah, is destroyed with the rest of that house by Jehu. A usurpation by the queen-mother for six years follows; the child Joash, the son of Ahaziah, is preserved and becomes king. Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz succeed each other in strict order, though Joash and Amaziah both died by conspiracy, and Ahaziah became a leper.

If the regularity of royal succession is a point of difference, the regularity of the priestly succession and of the divine services is quite as remarkable a one. The feasts might be sometimes intermitted; the rights of the year of jubilee violated. But the temple which Solomon had dedicated was continually in sight of the people. The daily sacrifices went on there; it was the perpetual resort of seers who desired to know the innermost meaning of the covenant; to acquaint themselves with Him who had promised to fill the house with his presence.

An inference might be drawn from this outward regularity, as to the inward state of the people, which would lead us astray. We are told that in the days of Rehoboam "Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that their fathers had done, for they built them high places and images and groves on every high hill and under every green tree. And they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel." Punishment followed directly upon their sins. "Shishak, the king of Egypt, to whom Jeroboam had fled, came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all." Still "Abijam walked in the sins of his father, which he had done before him." Asa is a reformer; he removes all the idols which his father had made, puts his mother away from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove, burns the idol and casts it into the brook Kidron. During these reigns the ten tribes are in continual war with the two: in Asa's time we even hear of a strange league between

Judah and Syria to oppose Baasha, king of Israel, who had built Ramah that he might not suffer any to go out or come in to the king of Judah. All this is changed in the time of Jehoshaphat. He makes peace with Ahab, and goes down with him against the Syrians to Ramoth Gilead. Jehoshaphat seems to have made Solomon his model. We are told that he built ships at Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold. He might hope to restore union to the tribes if he could not bring them again under his yoke. In spite of his connection with the idolatrous house, we are taught that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. In the book of Chronicles he is stated "to have set judges in all the land, throughout all the fenced cities, city by city, and to have said to them, 'Take heed what ye do, for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, and he is with you in the judgment.'" In the same record is a description of a great battle of his with the children of Moab and the children of Ammon and of others beside, and how they were smitten before a small host which trusted in the Lord. But the intermarriages with the house of Ahab led to two ignominious and idolatrous reigns, to the destruction of Jehoshaphat's grandson, and the tyranny of Athaliah. She first seems to have established the Baal-worship in Jerusalem. It was Jehoiada the priest who delivered the land from that worship and from her, and who restored and educated Joash.

Some writers assign the prophecy of Joel to the time of Joash. There is no sufficient evidence for that date except this; that he must be considerably earlier than Hosea, or Isaiah, who belong to the times of Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz, and that passages in his prophecy show him to have been subsequent to Jehoshaphat. He is one of those prophets who appears to have been also a priest. In the history of Israel the prophet stands often in marked distinction from the priests. He is the witness for the true God; for the divine order; the priests as well as the kings are the patrons or authors of disorder. In Judah, as we have seen, the case is different. There were plentiful elements of division and confusion, but there was a standing witness against them. Kings and priests were open to the same temptations here as in the other part of the land. But it was probable that some would always appear to restore the old discipline when it had been broken through. At the same time, it is quite evident that a strong necessity was beginning to arise in the land for witnesses against religious formality, as well as against the irregularity which is so frequently the reaction against it. It was the special vocation of the prophet to declare the meaning of his country's order, and thereby to prevent his brethren from mistaking it for routine. There was no reason why a priest should not vindicate his own hereditary work by fulfilling this function. After an unusual breach in the royal line, and disturbance of the divine rites, it would seem likely that the two offices would be united. In later times they may have been quite as often separated, though Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests of the temple at the time of its destruction.

This book of Joel is then a type of the early Jewish prophetical discourse, and may explain to us what distant events in the history of the land would expand it, and bring fresh discoveries within the sphere of the inspired man's vision. Joel speaks of a terrible northern army which is coming against Judah. It is an army of locusts, as really formidable as any human host could be. For, says the prophet, "A fire devoureth before them, and behind them a flame burneth. The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses, and as horsemen so shall they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap. Like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle-array. Before their face the people shall be much pained. All faces shall gather blackness. They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war, and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks. Neither shall one thrust another. They shall walk every one in his path, and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the walls; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. The earth shall quake before them, the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."

I have quoted this passage, though it is probably familiar to you all, and is connected with one which we shall be reading next Wednesday, because it may assist in removing some misapprehensions, more prevalent perhaps in the last century than in our own, but not yet extinct, respecting what is called the metaphorical language of the Old Testament writers. The eminent Bishop who wrote Prelections on Hebrew Poetry, and made a new translation of Isaiah, has done such good service to his own times and subsequent times by these works, that it would be most ungrateful to complain that his learning and taste did not always save him from the artificial phrases and habits of thought which characterize the poetry and criticism of his contemporaries. He and others have fostered the notion that the Jewish prophet adopted a diction which was certainly very beautiful, elevated, and suitable to an Oriental composition, but far removed from that style which conveys to a Western mind an impression of fact and reality. It is esteemed the highest praise of the prophets, that they were carried by divine inspiration or by the genius of their country far out of the path in which our minds naturally travel, and that they were able (so these commentators often express themselves) to invest great religious truths with the richest ornaments of the fancy.

Now when one considers what stern reprovers these prophets were, how they were overwhelmed with a sense of the evils which they actually saw, how continually they proclaimed it to be their task to strip off outsides and take away varnish that they might show the thing as it really was, it is difficult to understand how they can ever have practised arts of this kind, or that they would not have denounced as false prophets any who did. Whatever use Joel intended to make of this plague of locusts, it was surely a most tremendous fact for husbandmen and vine-dressers, for every man and woman and child in the land. Was it a time to be playing tricks with words, to be putting together choice sentences which after-times might admire and comment upon? Would after-times have troubled themselves the least with a man who had occupied himself with such a task? Would his own have been the least the better for it? Or if you fall back upon inspiration, is it in this way that a divine teacher leads a man to meditate upon the woes of his country? Is it thus he is lifted out of himself to trace the ways of the Most High? I apprehend that Joel's language is the language of poetry, only because that is the most strictly veracious language he could have employed; that which actually represented the fact better than any other; being the utterance of the inmost heart of a man who had felt and understood the fact better than any other, and who was endued with the power of making those who had witnessed it feel that he had understood it, since for the first time it came home in its power to themselves. I trust and believe that these remarks will sound to you commonplace, that you will have anticipated them all. The benefit that we have derived from clearer apprehensions of the nature of art generally, has, I am inclined to hope, reacted very usefully upon our study of the Scriptures, and has removed at least one impediment to our reading them simply as a child or a peasant reads them. Still I could not wholly suppress observations which apply, I believe, quite as strictly to all the more complicated prophecies we may consider hereafter, as they do to the description of locusts in the book of Joel.

This army the prophet looks upon as God's army. He hears the Lord's voice going before it. It is a day of the Lord; who can abide it? Those who saw the regular succession of prayers and sacrifices would naturally contract a faith in a regular succession of rain and crops. Both feelings were desirable until the sense of mere sequence in outward phenomena dulled the mind as to the invisible cause, the inward order which they betokened. When that effect had been produced, — and who knows not how soon it is produced, — the chain of custom and association must be broken through, or it will bind the spirit in an atheism the more fatal, because unsuspected. Joel hears in the army of locusts a distinct, loud call to repentance. "Therefore now, says the Lord, turn ye to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and weeping and mourning. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn ye to the Lord your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil." What special evils were they to turn from? If the solemn assembly which he asked for were called, if the fast were proclaimed, what would the people have to confess? Joel does not tell them. There is no enumeration of crimes like those which Amos charged upon different nations and different classes in his own nation. But a call to turn to God may be very practical when the voice of the teacher points to no specific offences, nay, when the conscience itself is awake to none. A dull mechanical temper of mind, obedience to mere custom, impulses communicated from without, not from a spirit within, a will recognizing no higher law than the opinion of men,—this is that turning away from God, that implicit denial of His presence, which makes it a most needful thing that the call should go forth from some human lips, and be echoed by unwonted natural calamities, and be received as coming straight from the mouth of the Lord, "Repent and be converted." The service of a righteous Being demands a righteousness corresponding to His; He who is a Spirit requires that we should worship Him in spirit and in truth. When we do not feel the force of the first claim, our religion becomes something wholly separated from morality; we are not just in our hearts or just in our doings, for we are not setting any standard of justice before us. When the second claim is not allowed, our minds must by degrees become grovelling and sensual, for we confess no power acting upon them or in them to raise them out of their natural sloth, to overcome their gravitation downward. The capacity for manly effort becomes feebler and feebler. A lion is always in the path to every duty. It is not the inner life, the kingdom of Heaven only, which is forgotten and disbelieved in; the spade and the plough lie idle; it is supposed that thorns and thistles are meant to possess the ground, and that man is not meant to remove them. How suitable a chastisement for individuals or nations in this condition is blight and mildew, the palmer-worm and the locust! The messengers of death are indeed messengers of resurrection. They say that all things must wither and die if man himself will not arise and live. In the torpor and palsy of all his powers and energies which he has brought upon himself, and which his circumstances are increasing, they force him to ask what power there is which can *make* him arise and live.

The prophet therefore does not forget that he is a priest of the temple. Because its services may have become unreal, he does not tell his countrymen to lay them aside. This pestilence is sent that they may become real. He would therefore have the priest weep between the porch and the altar; he would have a fast and a solemn assembly; he would have the bridegroom go forth out of his chamber and the bride out of her closet. God is inviting them to turn to Him and He will surely enable them to turn to Him. They have not believed too much that He was present in His own temple, at His own altar; they have forgotten that He was there. They have paid their offerings to Him without remembering that He was in the midst of them. Let them now come in the faith that He is there, and see whether He will bless them.

Joel's prophecy, like all the other prophecies, does not form one continuous discourse, but is broken into a number of discourses. It appears that his exhortation was heard, the assembly called, the fast decreed. The mind of the people was really aroused. There was an actual repentance. Then the prophet speaks again. "Fear not, O land! Be glad and rejoice. For the Lord will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, for the fig-tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad, then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God. For He hath given you the former rain moderately, and He will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month. And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the canker-worm and the caterpillar and the palmer-worm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the Name of the Lord your God, who hath dealt wondrously with you; and my people shall never be ashamed."

These will seem to many very earthly and carnal blessings to follow upon repentance, blessings such as indicate an unspiritual dispensation. But I apprehend that people who speak thus are in great hazard of becoming exceedingly unspiritual themselves. The corn and wine and oil are something to them, whether they acknowledge it or not. The question is, whether they shall look at these things simply in themselves and pay them honor for their own sakes, while they affect to despise them, or whether they shall look upon them as gifts and signs of One whom they cannot see, but who is present with them. And there is this question which follows from the other. Do we think of the corn and wine and oil only in connection with ourselves, or in connection with the land on which we are dwelling? Most assuredly, if we take the first course, we must be very earthly and sensual, because we must be utterly selfish. Joel took the other, and thereby found in those things which men covet and pursue to the exclusion of their brethren, therefore to the destruction of themselves, witnesses of his relation to all who dwelt on the soil, tokens of God's care for them and for it; assurances at the same time that he was educating them by the enjoyment of these things, or by the want of them, to seek after himself.

I prefer to place the defence of the prophet on this ground. I might easily defend him upon another; for these words, so well known from the use that is made of them in the New Testament, occur immediately after those which I have quoted. "And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh. And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my Spirit." This promise is connected, as it is in St. Peter's quotation of it, with a great and terrible day of the Lord. What the day was which the prophet looked forward to, we must try to ascertain from his own words. The coming of the locusts he had regarded as such a day; but that was past. That had been a revelation of the unseen presence; it had roused the nation to recollect God, it had done the work it was meant to do. The other day which he looked for is denoted in quite different language. "Behold, in those days," it is said, "and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and of Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations and parted my land." From these words it is very commonly concluded that the prophet is looking forward to a period subsequent, not only to the captivity of the ten tribes, but of the two; not to their captivity only, but their restoration. And since no great decisive battle can be found in that period it is supposed that the fulfilment of the words must be sought for in the Christian age. First, it is argued that it would be wrong not to make St. Peter, an inspired Apostle, the interpreter of the words which he adopted, by demanding any earlier accomplishment of them. A moment after, that power of interpretation is denied to the Apostle. For it is said that the day of the Lord which he expected, and for which he thought that the outpouring of the Spirit was a preparation, did not actually occur in his age, and has not occurred yet. I believe, brethren, that by adhering resolutely to the most obvious interpretation of the words we shall best understand what right St. Peter had to apply them to his own time, what justification there is for those who say they must have a mystical or spiritual interpretation, what excuse for connecting them with our own period, or with periods yet to come.

If you look at the third chapter of Joel, you will perceive to what captivity or captivities it is that the prophet is alluding. He complains that "Tyre and Sidon and the inhabitants of Palestine have taken away my silver and gold, and have carried into their temples my goodly pleasant things. The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border." The slightest attention to the history will show us that invasions of Judea by the surrounding nations were most frequent, that the cities and the temple were often rifled, that numbers of captives were carried away; these would be taken to Tyre and Sidon; they would be sold there for slaves. So commercial a people as the Phœnicians would of course very frequently sell them beyond the seas, to the countries with which they were trafficking. We have so used ourselves to the word captivity as applicable to one or two great deportations, that we very little appreciate the seriousness of these repeated invasions, and the continual misery which they caused. That which Joel anticipates is the punishment of all these robbers of men, and invaders of boundaries; some very sweeping and tremendous punishment, which would resemble in its results the great battle which Jehoshaphat fought with the Moabites and Ammonites, or which (since the word Jehoshaphat bears that signification) would be a great judgment of God upon the nations. What nation should execute this punishment, the prophet does not declare. Only he is sure that it will be a great day of decision, very fearful to all who are engaged in it. He is sure that the righteous sentence of God upon those who have been committing unrighteous and unbrotherly acts, will be seen in it. He is sure that the thieves will be forced to disgorge some of their unlawful prey. He is sure, lastly, that Jerusalem and Mount Zion will be brought through the conflict, "Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation."

If we compare the exceeding vividness of Joel's descriptions when he is treating of the actual miseries of his land, whether they come from a flight of locusts or from human marauders, with the dimness of his language respecting this approaching crisis, — dimness which is compatible with the most perfect confidence as to its result, — we shall learn much respecting the character of prophecy itself. Joel, indeed, the earliest of the written prophets, in a remarkable sense prepares us for those who are to follow him, as we sometimes see the moon in her first quarter with one bright luminous border and the complete orb lying pale and shadowy within it. He foresees the very event which Amos saw, with far more definiteness, because *he* contemplated it in reference to the three and four evils which it was to punish. Joel had spoken already of punishments and of repentance; he now looks forwards with certainty to some great struggle which shall test the strength of Mount Zion and Jerusalem, and show that those who believe in God have a sure foundation. He is quite aware how little he knows of the circumstances of the coming day. He is not to strengthen his countrymen for *it*. Before it comes others will be raised up to whom more full and clear vision will be granted. God will not bring on the terrible conflict till He has poured out of His Spirit on his servants and his handmaidens.

I think we shall find as we proceed, that both announcements had their exact and even their rapid accomplishment. We are entering upon a period of the history in many respects different from any that we have contemplated hitherto, — yet one for which all previous periods have been preparing. The little Jewish kingdom is to be brought into direct conflict with the great Asiatic monarchies. There will be an invasion which will fulfil all the expectations both of Amos and Joel, which will avenge the crimes of the petty nations against each other, which will bring to the ground the new prosperity of the ten tribes, which will show Judah its vanity and hollowness, which will attest the might of Him to protect it in whom it has not trusted. As that day approaches we shall find that a flood of light is poured into the minds of the seers who are to guide their country through its judgment day, light which was exactly adapted to the needs of that day, and yet which has guided the steps of His wayfarers in successive generations through hours of gloom and terror.

And since this conflict, so far from having ceased when we enter into the period of New Testament history, was then reaching its climax, since the full battle between the kingdom of righteousness and the kingdom of mere power was then brought to its great arbitrament when the crucified Son of God was proclaimed as the head of a polity comprehending all nations and languages, — a polity as extensive as the empire which had succeeded to the character and pretensions of the old Asiatic monarchies, — and since our Lord had declared that there was to be in *that* generation a great crisis which should show whether the powers of the earth would crush this feeble society, or whether it would come forth a new Jerusalem out of the ruins of the old, I apprehend St. Peter was not applying an old prophecy carelessly or allusively, but giving to it its full depth of meaning, when he said that the Pentecostal gift was that which Joel had spoken of generations before; that the Spirit of power and love and a sound mind, which had been bestowed upon them that they might testify of God's love and redemption to the world, was the Spirit who had spoken in old times by the prophets; that a day was at hand, which nothing but that Spirit could enable any to pass through.

And like days of the Lord, like battles in the valley of decision, have there been between the two kingdoms which are striving together upon this earth, often since that time. We may not be able to determine who were the combatants on each side. In a thousand cases it may be hard to say, "These were merely maintaining the evil cause, these were altogether on the side of justice, and truth, and order." There is often a strange confusion of banners; names and watchwords are imperfect helps in ascertaining who are doing God's work, who are hindering it. We must be content, yea, rejoice, that their judgment is not with us, but with the Lord. The old prophets tell us that Samaria was as evil as Tyrus, that there was, not seldom, a worse spirit in Jerusalem than in Moab. They tell us this. It is the main cause of their sorrow and anguish. But it does not lead them to doubt that there is a battle between God and His enemies. It drives them to think of Him firstly and chiefly; because He is light, and in Him is no darkness; because all manner of evil in sinners and saints, in those who confess His name or in those who are ignorant of it, must be hateful to Him; and all good wherever it lies scattered must be from Him, and must be at last gathered to His side.

O brethren, let us learn this great lesson. We know not when the final day of decision is to be. But there is some day of decision in every age, some great battle of truth and falsehood, of righteousness and injustice, of love and self-will, in which we must one and all take part. There is a power of destruction at work in every society, in every heart. Do not fancy that you are less in danger from it than your forefathers were. It is nearest to you when you are least aware of its approaches, when you are least on your watch against it. A day may be very near at hand when the question will be forced upon every one, and when every one must give the answer to it, "Art thou on the side of self-willed power, or of righteousness? Dost thou worship the Devil or the Father of lights?" As that great and terrible day approaches, terrible to every man who knows what the treachery of his own heart is, and yet most blessed, because in that day God will cast out the dividing, destructive principle on which He has pronounced His sentence, which Christ died to overcome, we must seek a fulfilment of the old promise which has never failed yet. Before any great critical event, any world epoch, there has been vouchsafed to the humble and meek, greater insight into the past, greater foresight of that which is to come. There has been a power of vision, a capacity of looking into the meaning of things, a discovery of the springs which lie beneath the surface, which are only granted when they are desired not for the glory of the seeker, but for the necessities of the Church and of mankind. It is not that there are more young or old men dreaming dreams in the sense which we sometimes give to that phrase; men flying from the facts of the world, dwelling in a region of fancy. The dreams which Joel and St. Peter spoke of, indicate a closer contact with realities, a more inward communion with Him who is true, an intolerance of shadows, a longing for substance. Such dreams come not through the multitude of business nor through the listlessness which follows it. They come to earnest spirits struggling for life, wearied with the noise of the world, with the strife of nations and opinions, distrusting themselves, believing in God.

But that we may not receive, instead of this true spirit of wisdom and light, a fanatical spirit which will fill us with conceits, which will divide us from our brethren, which will drive us at last among the world's swine and then down a steep place into the deep, we should remember that the prophet who speaks of seeing visions and dreaming dreams, speaks first of turning to the Lord with all the heart. Repentance is God's choicest and deepest gift; repentance for our habitual dreariness and coldness, for that shallowness of heart which overtakes us when we are surrounded with the tokens of His presence, when we are partakers of the ordinances of His grace; which those very privileges seem to produce in us; from which troubles, individual or national, cannot of themselves deliver us. Divines may have infinite refinements about the mode, degrees, and effect of repentance. That one phrase of Scripture, "turning to God," contains, I think, all that we can say of it. "Man, thou art living, moving, having thy being in One whom thou art habitually forgetting. That forgetfulness makes thee forget thy brethren; yea, and in the truest sense, forget thyself. Thou dost not know what thou art, whither thou art tending. All the earth is a riddle to thee. Thy fellow-men are hindrances in thy way. Thou art thine own great curse and terror. Recollect from whom come the thoughts and impulses of the mind and will within thee; who can make those thoughts and impulses an order instead of a chaos. Turn round to the light which is ever sending flashes into the midst of thy darkness. Ask that instead of such momentary appearances, from which thou shrinkest as a guilty thing surprised, it may penetrate thee and possess thee, and become thy constant habitation. Open thine eyes and see what witnesses there are of this light all around thee. Every church, every prayer, every season of the year, is testifying of it and reminding thee of it. These are visible things, established upon earth, powerless in themselves; but signs of a Kingdom of Heaven; signs of a power which can transform thee and transform the world. When thou yieldest thyself to its transforming energy, thou wilt not bear to see the earth lying crushed under the weight of its sins and oppressions. Thou wilt believe in thy heart and declare with thy lips that in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, in the Church which God has set up, in the people who believe in His love, there is a prophecy of deliverance for the universe."

SERMON XII.

THE UNFAITHFUL WIFE.

LINCOLN'S INN, 1ST SUNDAY IN LENT. — FEB. 29, 1852.

For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold which they prepared for Baal. — HOSEA ii. 8.

THE history of the ten tribes after the death of Jeroboam II. explains and confirms the terrible warnings of Amos. " Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam, reigned over Israel for six months. And Shallum, the son of Joash, conspired against him and smote him before the people, and slew him, and reigned in his stead. Shallum reigned a full month in Samaria, for Menahem, the son of Gadi, went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and reigned in his stead." This reign lasted ten years. It is very memorable in the history, for in the course of it, Pul, the king of Assyria, came against the land. " And Menahem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. And he exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Assyria. So that he turned back, and stayed not there in the land." — 2 Kings xv. Thus the first appearance of this great empire in connection with the Palestine people is a sure witness of all that is to follow. The king becomes at once the tributary; he trusts to Assyria to keep him on the throne; he incurs the hatred of his most powerful subjects to obtain this protection. His son reigns for two years, then "Pekah, the son of Remaliah, a captain of his, smote him in Samaria, in the palace of the king's house, with fifty men of the Gileadites, and he killed him and reigned in his room." Possibly the Assyrian tendencies of Menahem and his son were the cause of this insurrection; Pekah may have been the head of a national or of an Egyptian party. He had certainly ambitious projects, for he conspired with Rezin the king of Syria against Jerusalem and its king, with the deliberate purpose of overthrowing the house of David.

The kings of that house after Joash, viz. Amaziah, Uzziah, and Jotham, are all spoken of with respect; "they did that which was right in the sight of the Lord," but Amaziah vaingloriously "defied the king of Israel to look him in the face, and Judah was put to the worst before Israel, and Jehoash took Amaziah king of Judah, and came to Jerusalem, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in the House of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and hostages, and returned to Samaria." This was the greatest humiliation which Judah had suffered, just at a time when it probably hoped to conquer the tribes that inflicted it. In Amaziah's reign and in that of his son and grandson, we are told that the high places were not taken away, that the people did sacrifice and burnt incense in them. There must have been therefore a continual growth of superstition and idolatrous worship during the period before the reign of Ahaz. All the open and latent corruptions and unbelief of the people, embodied themselves in this king. His predecessors had not tried to extirpate the evil, though they were personally pure from it. "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and burnt incense on the high places and on the hills, and under every green tree." One can understand how such a man would feel and act when he heard that two neighboring kings were conspiring against him. The heart of him and of his people, we are told, was moved by the news of it, as the trees are moved by the wind. He could think only of the immediate danger, and how to avert that. "So he sent messengers to Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria, saying, 'I am thy servant and thy son. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Syria, and out of the hand of the king of Israel, which rise up against me. And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him; for he went up against Damascus and took it, and carried the people of it captive to Kir, and slew Rezin.'" — 2 Kings xvi. 7. We are told before, xv. 29, that "he took Ijon, and Kedesh, and Hazor, and Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and carried them captive to Assyria."

By far the most profound commentary upon these records, as they bear upon Judah, upon Israel, upon the surrounding nations, upon the Asiatic monarchies, upon the future condition of God's kingdom and of mankind, is to be found in the prophecies of Isaiah, which I propose hereafter to consider. But there is an earlier prophet who is the proper preparation for Isaiah; a prophet from whom one learns, more perhaps than from any other, the intensely individual and intensely national character of that work to which prophets were called; the actual meaning of the divine covenant; the state and the sins of a people living under one; the reason and method of the divine punishments; the ground upon which a seer, crushed under the sense of his nation's sins, could hope for its restoration.

Those who have studied the words of Hosea, the son of Beeri, most carefully, are convinced that the greater part of his life must have been passed in the kingdom of Israel. He speaks, they say, of its hills and valleys, of its villages and fenced cities, in a way which shows that he had been brought up among them; that they had worked themselves into his heart, as only that scenery can, which is dear from the associations of childhood and home. He dwells upon the special corruptions of the ten tribes, of their kings and priests, like one who was in direct contact with them; who knew what was going on in the land, and had looked into the inmost heart of it. On the other hand, it is observed that when he turns to Judah he exhibits the sympathy and affection of a child of Abraham; but still of a comparative stranger. He has at first well-grounded hopes of it, such as he could not cherish for his own soil; but as time advances, and his knowledge becomes greater, these hopes are united with the saddest forebodings. One sister he finds is scarcely less treacherous than the other, nay, the treachery of Judah, if less flagrant, seems to him more deep; there is a falsehood in both which terrible fires must burn out. These remarks are of great use, because they show how real the diction of every true prophet is; how directly it is drawn from actual nature; how much of what we call Oriental extravagance and hyperbole is supplied by our own loose and careless mode of reading. It saves us trouble to bestow some general names of this kind, upon epithets and descriptions which may indicate the clearest perception of external objects, and are expressions of the most living inward convictions.

We do not, however, want arguments of this kind to prove that Hosea, at all events, was busy with facts and not with fictions. He had to understand the principles of his country's history by most fearful passages in his own. Because the land had committed great adulteries, departing from the Lord, he must marry an adulteress, he must experience again and again her infidelities; she was to bear children, whose names would denote her shame; for whom he must feel a father's yearnings, yet whom he could not dare to call his. The wife was at length to desert him for her lovers. He was again to redeem her; to endure the intolerable anguish of love struggling with indignation and disgust; to exhibit his love in the true and only possible form of restraint and punishment; to see through that punishment glimpses of hope; faint, flickering tokens of reformation, in themselves quite unsatisfactory, yet testifying that there is a power in love which may triumph at last over the most obstinate resistance. A fearful education for a man to pass through, fearful beyond any racks and dungeons by which saints in later days have been trained to faith and patience; yet it must have brought Hosea into depths of insight and wisdom which all times may discern and profit by. His words may have been imperfectly understood, a number of his allusions may baffle even learned interpreters; but the most simple have obtained from him hints of truths, which every day's experience of themselves and of the world has made more precious; and which, they believe, the ages to come will not exhaust, but develop. For there is, I conceive, in every prophecy, and in every book which God has intended for the instruction of men, a leading thought which forces itself upon the mind of a serious reader, — though he is a mere wayfarer, — almost without his knowing it; and this thought becomes a part of him, and interprets perplexing facts which cross him in his ordinary path. If you question him as to the way in which he arrived at his knowledge, he may be quite unable to answer you; his impression of the surrounding details may be vague and confused to the last degree; nevertheless he has a secret which you must use if you would have a clearer insight respecting those details. Apart from the central truth, to which he is often led by what may truly be called divination, the book is a rhapsody; no geographical, chronological, or philological facts — immeasurably valuable as they all are — can make it orderly or reasonable. In Hosea's case the leading thought reveals itself without any divination. He makes known to us, at the outset of the book, the fearful discipline which is the key to all the contents of it. The mystery of marriage, the violation of vows, the husband's long-suffering, the way in which it works, — these are not the ornaments of the book, but the subjects of it; they are never absent for a moment from the mind of the writer; they should not be absent from our minds if we would know what lessons he has to teach respecting his own land, or our land, or ourselves. The cardinal doctrine of Hosea's prophecy and of his life, that without which one is as unintelligible as the other, is that man being made in the image of God, all human relationships are images of Divine relationships, that through them God acquaints us with His character and government; that in them we are to show forth that character and government.

Any verbal statement of this doctrine naturally provokes this objection. "That," it is said, "might be true if human relationships were in their proper, reasonable condition. But manifestly they are not. We are fallen beings. Our fallen condition lies at the very root of our intercourse with each other, — of our affections and sympathies. You cannot, without the grossest extravagance, scarcely without blasphemy, connect them with any thing celestial or divine. They are of the earth, earthly. You must acknowledge them to have this origin, and then try, as well as you can, to rectify the more flagrant anomalies in them, by the restraints of law, the arguments and influences of religion."

Here is the answer. Hosea's marriage assumes, if any one ever did, a false condition of things, the existence of all possible evil and contradiction. There is nothing Utopian surely in his view of domestic or of public life. He enters, with a foresight — very imperfect, doubtless, falling immeasurably short of the dreadful reality, but still with a foresight — of the consequences, upon a life which he knows will be one of personal misery. He does this expressly to illustrate the course of the Divine procedure. This was the prophet's appointed duty. Explain it as you will, but admit at least that he does not recognize the fallen nature itself, or the most actual and terrible results of that nature in the most depraved society, as setting aside the order which God has established, or making the exhibition of that order impossible.

Hosea began with the belief that his nation was holy, called by God to be holy, because He was holy. That belief had to struggle with evidence which seemed to set it utterly at naught, to make it absolutely ridiculous and monstrous. A holy nation! why, "there is no truth nor mercy nor knowledge of God in the land." A holy nation! why, "by swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." A holy nation! why, "it is like people, like priest, and the prophets are with them." A holy nation! why, "the king is glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies; the king is a drunkard; he stretcheth out his hand with the scorners." This a holy nation! What, because Abraham its first father was holy? because it bears the sign of the covenant which testified that he *believed* God, and which denoted that he was separated from his own lust and from the surrounding world to his maker? Could a prophet, an earnest, righteous man, believe such a fiction as this? And yet it stands written, "This is a holy nation"! God, who cannot lie, has pronounced it so. He has spoken not of a few individuals in it, — exceptions from the rest, — as consecrated, redeemed, devoted to Him; He has bestowed that title upon *Israel.* What can it mean? How can I, a prophet, admit the facts of which my ear bears witness, and yet cleave to these assertions which come, as I have always thought, from One who knows what my eyes and ears cannot tell me, who looks into the very secrets of things?

Hosea discovered the reconciliation of these Divine declarations, and these facts of human observation, in one case, by realizing it in another. Could he deceive himself, that the bond which united him to Gomer, the daughter of Dibleam, was a holy bond? Was not the ground of it holy? God had instituted it. Was not it holy in its very principle and nature? It expressed an entire love and devotion on his side, to one who gave up herself to him. Did he not feel and know that, in trying to carry out the meaning of it, he was raised above himself; that he acted in a way in which he could not have acted from any mere impulses of his own? Every thing in his life tended to awaken personal bitterness; yet a tenderness was called forth in him towards her which surmounted that bitterness and transformed it. This tenderness extended to her children; it became a part of his life. It not only did not exclude horror of her wrong-doings, they grew up side by side; one sustained the other; each was stronger as the mere sense of injury and insult to himself was chastened and subdued. From what source could such feelings come? how were they kept alive? They must be derived out of a higher love; a love utterly unselfish; patient of the wrong-doer; detesting the wrong. That love must be the law of His being who gives man his law; it must be the guide and measure of His acts who directs the acts and the will of man.

This was a revelation indeed, worth the cost of unspeakable suffering. But see what was implied in it. Hosea had not merely learnt how he might be a gracious, loving man, and might show forth grace and love to one who had gone astray. He had not merely learnt that God desired him to have this character, because it corresponded to his own. He had been taught that when he was most true, most loving, most holy, he was but conforming to an order; and that his wife, when most false, was but violating this order. He was but submitting to follow a law under which he had been placed; to act out the relation into which he had entered. She was claiming to have a way of her own, refusing to be under a law; saying that the relation into which she had entered was a restraint upon her liberty. Did not the interpretation of that seeming opposition between faith and experience lie here? Did not experience itself offer the most perfect vindication of faith? Precisely what was true of this woman was true of the nation to which she belonged. It was brought into an order. The unseen Lord had declared, that it was in an actual relation to Him; that it stood while it acknowledged Him and depended upon Him; that when it ceased to acknowledge Him, it would fall under the dominion of its own instincts and appetites; that these instincts and appetites would assuredly make it the slave of all visible things. It *had* ceased to acknowledge Him, to believe Him; it *had* fallen into this slavery. Kings, priests, people, prophets, had fallen into it. There was no need of arguments to prove it. The low animal habits of the people declared on what objects they were setting their hearts; every high hill and grove showed how their religion was working with their natural tendencies; giving them a sanction, aggravating them, receiving back ever-fresh corruption from them. What name could be found for such offences? — a name denoting at once the principle and effect of them. Hosea could only call them *adulteries*. The nation had been married to an unseen husband, to whom it was bound by all holy bonds and covenants. These bonds and covenants might be regarded as merely artificial and imaginary; they would, of course, be so regarded, the moment the nation had become incapable of counting any thing as real that was not visible; the moment it had passed into an utterly idolatrous condition of mind. But their reality would be proved by the gradual dissolution of all other bonds and covenants, by the growing tendency in the members of the nation to deny that they stood in any relation to each other, by the practice of the majority assuming that each man lived for himself, by the increased strength and definiteness and popularity of doctrines which justified that practice; lastly, by facts which showed that those who treated the Divine covenant as a fantasy and a fiction became themselves the sports of every fantasy and fiction, that they could confess nothing else, live in nothing else. This was the condition into which the prophets saw that the land of their fathers, every flower and stone of which was dear to them, was actually hastening; this utterly bewildered condition, in which all names and forms were interchanged and inverted; the great disease of which was the utter unconsciousness of any disease, the self-flattery which assumed the flush and fever of consumption as signs of health, as pledges of endurance.

Can you wonder that Hosea's words, just because they were the words of a sane, thoughtful, far-seeing man, should have seemed to those who heard them like the ravings of a madman? Men who have ceased to believe in a nation, who do not feel that the name denotes any thing substantial, who look upon it merely as a collection of atoms, who have lost all sense of a connection between past, present, and future, who only know that they exist in the passing moment, and suspect that a chaos lies before and behind them, — such men must mock at the discourses of a prophet. He talks of a *nation's* ruin, a *nation's* dissolution; what can that signify? That which he dreads as the most fearful of all consummations has for them taken place already. Relationships have become to them nonentities; mere creatures of the imagination. What if they *should* perish more completely still? Would not the corn and the wine, the silver and the gold, still remain? Might not those who have these possessions still enjoy them, and perhaps more abundantly?

No! says the prophet, this is part of the woe which I am sent to pronounce upon you; not the worst part, assuredly; but a part which you can understand, and which you must listen to. The corn and the wine and the oil, the silver and the gold, will *not* continue. You do not know that the unseen God has given you them; you are dedicating them to Baal; you are worshipping a God of corn and wine and oil, of silver and gold; a God whose main characteristic in your judgment is, that he sends these things or withholds them according to no rule at all, or according to the rules which you follow in the distribution of your treasures; whom rich men, therefore, by a profitable outlay of a portion of their treasures in his service, may induce to favor them and to keep them superior to the rest of their countrymen. It will not be, cannot be. The coming and the going of these gifts which you count so precious, depend upon laws which you hold vile and trample upon. These outward things are contingent upon the moral laws, upon the spiritual relations in which you have ceased to believe. When these are utterly set at naught, you will seek in vain for the others. You will invoke all your gods to help you; they will not nerve arms which indolence and despair have palsied, they will not enable men to work for a common object, who have learned to think that each exists only for himself.

You will find that one great part of Hosea's prophecy relates to this subject. The misery and poverty of his treacherous wife when she has betaken herself to her seducers are the inevitable consequences of her revolt and their indifference; the like effects will be produced in the nation by the like causes. The analogy has many sides. The lovers of Israel were not only the false gods whom she chose instead of the true; the cowardice to which faithlessness and idolatry had given birth led her, as we have heard, to turn to the human powers which were threatening her existence. There was a party which pointed to Egypt as their natural ally and protector; another, and in the ten tribes apparently the most powerful party, which would stay upon Assyria. "I am thy servant and thy son," was the ignominious confession which Menahem made by his acts, and which the degenerate descendant of David afterwards uttered in express words. What would come of it? The invader, having laid waste the land, would be content for a time with homage and tribute; through the effect of his devastation, from the reasonable dread of his return, the land would be untilled; when he came again he would take, not produce, but people. Shameful slavery might be nothing if the corn and wine and oil might be saved; but could they be saved?

Bishop Butler has argued that the *natural* punishment of human offences is so strictly analogous to the *Divine* punishment of them, that, if experience forces us to confess the one, reason cannot forbid us to believe the other. Surely the Scripture goes a step further. It treats the natural mischiefs which flow from a certain course of conduct as witnesses that there is a Divine Law, with which men are intended to be in conformity, and that they have chosen to live as if no such law existed. In this sense the natural punishments are not *analogous* to the Divine punishments, but identical with them. And so long as punishment is merely looked upon as natural, so long as it is merely the fruit of my own devices, there is a hopelessness and interminableness in it which language may seek to express, but cannot. It is a law which executes itself; and the violator of the law feels that every moment the power of fulfilling it becomes less, the desire to transgress it greater. He feels consequently that evil must go on perpetuating and multiplying itself; and he feels that its death wages must be punctually paid. This is all that a man contemplating the world, either as a mere Atheist or as a Theist, who supposes God has left it to live without Him, under the guidance of certain laws, which He imposed upon it thousands of years ago, can arrive at. The heart may revolt at the conclusion, there may be an inward cry of the spirit, "It cannot be so; there must be something more than this"; but the dry logical intellect can affirm nothing more; the most extensive and impartial survey of facts seems to authorize nothing more. And there is a higher moral instinct — a sense of justice — which affirms, "So it ought to be." What disturbs the calculation? What introduces another element into it? Human relationships imply more than this mere natural sequence, than this chain of antecedents and consequents. The revolting wife, when the corn and wine and oil which she sought from her lovers have failed, will not only feel that her own acts have made the failure necessary. She will say, "Did not my husband give me all these things. Was I not better with him?" That thought, however mixed with grossness and selfishness; though it may still dwell chiefly upon the external rewards of love and obedience; though their own blessedness may still be far off, yet indicates a dream and recollection of another state. In the deepest degradation these things could never be the only objects of desire. Some distorted affection for a personal object, some incoherent sense of attachment, had always prevented the spirit from being absolutely mercenary, how near soever it might approach to that ruin. But now that thought of a person becomes connected with the sense of obligations, of plighted faith, of a moral order. What had been felt as an iron chain is now thought of as a silken cord, which need not have been broken; to which the spirit might have submitted, as a pledge of a protecting, watchful, present love. Precisely this process is exhibited to us by Hosea as passing in the heart of his fallen wife; and leading to the resolution, weakly formed and soon to be evaded again, "I will return to my first husband." And then the human punishment — so different from the mere natural punishment, yet so carefully recognizing the truth and justice and necessity of that — begins; the same discipline of restraint, the denial of enjoyments and luxuries; the slow education which may bring the spirit to understand that it has infinite appetites, which the corn and the wine and the oil will not satisfy.

In carrying out this discipline, amidst all doubts and anxieties as to the result of it, and in combining with this discipline words and acts of gentle and gracious loving-kindness, Hosea was exhibiting a true though most imperfect analagon of that divine discipline which the inevitable laws of nature do not represent, but of which they are the obedient ministers. Israel was eating the fruit of his own devices, Ephraim was joined to his idols: the sentence might go forth, "Let him alone." But the God who had bound the nation to Himself by covenants as strong and real as the bond which He established on the Creation-day for male and female, — covenants expressing a relationship resting on an absolute and eternal goodness, — would not suffer a self-willed people to lose itself in perpetual degeneracy, in utter slavery. The corn and the wine and the oil should perish; the Assyrian who had courted and betrayed should have his victim. But in every visitation of famine or conquest brought on by the wife's adulteries, the voice of the first husband should still be heard, "I love thee: return to me."

I have tried to tell you, brethren, what this prophet was appointed to say to his wife and to his nation. Shall I tell you what he is saying to us? If I talk of God being in covenant with this nation of England, of His having adopted and claimed us as His own, I should be accused by most persons of using a dialect natural, innocent, professional, perfectly unmeaning, without the slightest reference to existing facts and experience. Religious people would perhaps take another tone. One class of them would say, "You are applying to the whole of the nation, language which belongs to some members of it. We believe in a covenant with God. But what has the ungodly world about us to do with that?" Another class would say, "The great Catholic Church is in covenant with God. Baptism has taken one divine society out of the ruined mass. But why do you talk as if a race of Saxons settled on this soil were like the Jews of the former dispensation?" If I were answering these objectors, I should say to the first, "Assert individual faith and individual responsibility as much as you can. But take care that you have something to believe in, something to be responsible for. If you make your faith and your responsibility the conditions of God's covenant, and not God's covenant the warrant for your faith and your responsibility, I am greatly afraid that you will soon believe only in yourselves, and submit to no judgment but your own." To the others I would say, "Assert the universality of God's covenant as broadly as you can. Let it not be limited to any nation, any race. But take care that you do not set up the Catholic Church against that humanity which Christ took, and for which he died. If you do, if you make the baptized Church a witness against the relation of mankind to God, and not the express and appointed witness for it, that Church, instead of standing out as an exception in an ungodly and immoral world, will exhibit its immorality and ungodliness in the foulest, most concentrated, most deadly form."

But I would rather address myself to-day to those who — on no theological ground, but simply from general incredulity — scoff at the notion that there is a covenant with our Sovereign and people, as real as there was with the Sovereign and people of the Jews. I press them with no arguments from Scripture at all. I do not appeal to the creed of Christendom, which they say they have outgrown. My evidence in support of this (fiction) would be drawn from the homes and hearths of England. I would say, "Look well to it, you who have not made up your minds to see all domestic bonds and relationships utterly set at naught; who still hold that any of the blessedness and glory of your land is owing to them. Do you think that the corn and the wine and the oil, the silver and the gold, will preserve them? Do you think that all mechanical devices for the multiplication of the corn and the wine and the oil will preserve them? Do you think that the pursuit or the acquisition of the silver and gold is preserving them? Do you not know that home affections and sympathies are perishing through your devotion to these objects? — perishing among the rich, because the craving for outward gratifications, and for the money which is to purchase them, withers up the sympathies of the parent, makes the restraints of authority and the bonds imposed by birth irksome to the children (who must have affinities and pleasures which they have created for themselves); — perishing among the poor, because we regard them, and have taught them to regard themselves, chiefly as instruments for producing the corn and the wine and the oil, for increasing the silver and gold; so that family life is an impossibility and a dream to most of them, and their existence is daily becoming more sensual and animal. I say, we know that these things are so. We may disguise them from ourselves, and amuse ourselves with phrases about national prosperity; but there is a canker at the root of it. It is spreading. Unless it is stopped, not the Bible history only, but every history, tells us the result of it. And how may it be stopped? I answer, "Only when we come seriously to believe that these human relationships, these human affections, have a ground deeper than themselves; that there is an actual relationship between us, our kings, our priests, and God; that it is based upon His own gracious will, upon His own eternal love; that He owns it, though we deny it. When once we have taken that conviction home to our hearts, there is a hope of national restoration, of the revival of all domestic affections. For then we are no longer the victims and slaves of that necessity to which our own self-will has subjected us; we are no longer bound to live for the sake of the corn and the wine and the oil, the silver and the gold, or to make others die for the sake of them. We can return to our first Husband, and ask Him not to let these material blessings, which have come from Him, turn into curses and prove our destruction; but that He will, by taking them from us, by any restraints or punishments which may seem good to Him, bring us back to Trust in Him and to Fellowship with one another."

SERMON XIII.

THE VISION OF THE KING.

Lincoln's Inn, 2d Sunday in Lent. — March 7, 1852.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. — Isaiah vi. 1.

This vision evidently contains the designation of Isaiah to his work as a prophet. It does not follow that he may not himself have put his book together in the form, or nearly in the form, in which we have received it. The early chapters, as they describe the state of the people, not at one particular moment, but through a course of years, announcing the punishments which must follow from that state with the blessings which would come out of them, are a living index to the subsequent prophecies and history. The place which they occupy, supposing it was assigned by Isaiah, cannot hinder us from accepting his own express words as a proof, that the year in which King Uzziah died was the critical one of his life, that which explained to him why he had been sent into the world, and what task he had to perform in it.

In that year he saw the Lord also sitting upon a throne. We are not told whether he saw this sight before or after the death of Uzziah. That king had long been a leper, dwelling apart from his people. Isaiah might have been thinking that a time was near when even this semblance of royalty would pass away, when the poor stricken man would be gathered to his fathers. Or he might be wondering at the wild pleasure with which the people of Jerusalem hailed his successor, at the indifference with which they remembered the former ruler, at the dull mechanical way in which all things went on, as if the departure of a shepherd of the people from the land left no gap in it at all. Whatever thoughts were occupying him when he entered into the temple, symbols were there which told him of something more permanent and substantial than the reign of a king or the recollections of his subjects. There were the cherubim veiling the mercy-seat; there was the altar on which the daily sacrifices were offered; there was the holiest place into which the high-priest entered once every year. It was a place full of wonder and mystery. And yet how little consciousness of any wonder or mystery there seemed to be in those who went in and out of it; how little in those who presented the offerings, and had " Holiness to the Lord " written on their foreheads! With what hymns of joy had David entered into the city and borne the ark to the holy mountain! With what awe had Solomon prayed that the presence of the Lord might fill the house in which he and his people were worshipping together! What a sense of oppression and death there was now over both! No apparent calamity approaching; every thing even and regular, as it had been for many a year past; but a feeling like that of a hot evening before a thunder-storm, when all looks serene, but there is no breath of air. What could have relieved a man upon whose breast this heavy burden was sitting, who had a feeling of endless weariness, monotony, insincerity, in the ordinary life of his fellow-citizens, in the most sacred and divine ordinances?

"I saw the Lord also sitting on a throne, and his train filled the temple." Some of you may have been watching a near and beautiful landscape in the land of mountains and eternal snows, till you have been exhausted by its very richness, and till the distant hills which bounded it have seemed, you know not why, to limit and contract the view, and then a veil has been withdrawn, and new hills, not looking as if they belonged to this earth, yet giving another character to all that does belong to it, have unfolded themselves before you. This is an imperfect, very imperfect likeness (yet it is one) of that revelation which must have been made to the inner eye of the prophet, when he saw another throne than the throne of the house of David, another king than Uzziah or Jotham, another train than that of priests or minstrels in the temple, other winged forms than those golden ones which overshadow the mercy-seat. Each object was the counterpart of one that was then, or had been at some time, before his bodily eyes; yet it did not borrow its shape or color from those visible things. They evidently derived their substance and radiance from those which were invisible. Separated from them they could impart no lustre; for they had none. The kings of the house of David reigned, because that king was reigning whom God had set upon His holy hill of Zion; because He lived on when they dropped one and another into their graves; because in Him dwelt the light and the power by which each might illumine his own darkness, sustain his own weakness. The symbols and services of the temple were not, as priests and people often thought, an earthly machinery for scaling a distant heaven; they were witnesses of a heaven nigh at hand, of a God dwelling in the midst of His people, of His being surrounded by spirits which do His pleasure, hearkening to the voice of His words.

"Above the throne stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings. With twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." The sense of awe increasing with the clearness and purity of a spirit, and with the nearness of its approach to God; the face being veiled which receives its light from Him, and most covets to behold him; the absence of all wish to display their own perfections in spirits that are perfect; the freedom and the willingness to go anywhere, to do any errands of mercy; these are some of the more obvious thoughts which the study of this vision suggests. There are others which lie hidden, which we may have a glimpse of from time to time, and which words might mar. For it is true of earthly symbols, still more of heavenly visions, that they are meant to carry us out of words and above words; not so that we despise *them*, or think lightly of them, but that we, seeing the reality of the invisible, may not be greatly disturbed by the processes and conceits of our minds.

"And one cried unto another and said, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.'" From what we have been told of the Eastern imagery of the prophetical writings, and from the specimens we have had of other Oriental writings, we certainly should expect here some gorgeous accumulation of superhuman glories. But the vision reaches its highest point in the cry, Holy, holy, holy. It is the holiness of God which the seraphim proclaim, that which cannot be represented to the eye, that of which descriptions and symbols offer no image. It is that holiness which fills, not the heaven of heavens only, but the whole earth, seeing that was made very good, seeing that in its order and constitution it was still perfectly good, though men defiled it by their deeds, though the habitations of cruelty were set up in the midst of it.

"And the posts of the door were moved at the voice of him who cried. And the house was filled with smoke." The posts of the door moved at the voice which declared that the Holy One was there. The house was filled with smoke, because the fire of His love was kindling the sacrifices. The sights and sounds of Sinai would not have made the Israelites tremble as they did, if they had been merely sights and sounds of overwhelming and destructive power; they spoke first of Truth, of Holiness. And that Truth and Holiness did not dwell aloof and at a distance from the man, as in the burning mountain, but in the very house which every Israelite might claim as his home.

It was this which led the prophet to say, "Woe is me! For I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips. For mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

When we try to convince ourselves or others of guilt, we often heap up epithets concerning the justice of God, the demands which He makes upon the service of creatures, the certainty that every transgression must entail an unutterable punishment. I do not think we find that such representations produce much effect upon the conscience of our hearers. They awaken a temporary dread of an unknown vengeance. They do *not* awaken the sense of inward evil, or lead to the confession of it. The promises of mercy by which we are obliged to mitigate these apparently awful and hopeless statements, deprive them of all their sting. If not, there is an instinct in the heart which rejects them as exaggerated, unless there is another which drives it to despair. It is altogether different when a Being who is saying to us, "Be ye holy, for I am holy," is presented to the conscience and is recognized by it. Then there is no calculation of possible consequences, no weighing and balancing of what may come or may not come of resistance to such a Being or of struggle with His will. *Then* and *there* the man feels himself condemned. It is not a future state, but his present state, which makes him tremble. "Woe is me, for *I am* a man of unclean lips. My words are not pure. The source from which they spring is not pure. And I am brought face to face with the Lord of my heart and reins, with Him who has a right to rule my words, with the pure spring from which my thoughts and desires and impulses ought to flow. Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts." In such a revelation the discovery of personal evil comes first. The man does not look about him to compare his offences with those of other men and try which are the heavier. It is not this or that particular offence, no, nor a multitude of particular offences, that overwhelms him; it is the feeling of a root of bitterness; not, "I have done this or that wrong," but, "I am wrong." Not, however, that this thought could long be separated from the one of which it must take precedence. "I dwell among a *people* of unclean lips." There is the same pollution in them which there is in me. Each of us is living to himself. Each is living apart from that God who has called us to be holy as He is. He is attended by obedient spirits, spirits united in obedience, working together as His servants, for the fulfilment of His purposes. We are separate and broken; every man following a way of his own; not a people, because we do not believe that a King is with us.

"Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. And he laid it upon my mouth and said, ‘Lo, this hath touched thy lips, and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged.’” The cherubim in the temple represented no doubt spiritual powers and presences in the most general sense, those who look upon God and reflect His light. If we distinguish between them and the seraphim, as we do in our “Te Deum,” these last would seem more especially to represent those divine energies and affections of which the zeal, devotion, and sympathy of man are the counterparts. The altar on which the sacrifices were offered, denoted intercourse and communion between the creature and the Creator, the offering up of the man to God in the faith that God had offered Himself to him. The live coal on the altar is a substance dead and cold in itself, which has been kindled from above, and therefore is capable of imparting life and warmth. That warmth and life, communicated to the prophet, take away his iniquity and purge his sin. What he had been conscious of, was coldness, indifference, estrangement. All his uncleanness had come from this. He and his people were impure because they had lost that common life and love which belonged to them while they were living as the people of God, while they were remembering His presence among them. That was a quickening, vivifying, uniting presence. Ceasing to acknowledge it, they lost their national heart, they were a heap of fragments divided and selfish; therefore unclean. Now this heart was restored to the prophet. The zeal of God’s house was consuming him. He was an Israelite and a righteous man, for his mind was at one with the mind of the King of Israel, the righteous God.

“Also I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Then said I, 'Here am I. Send me.'" The mighty change which has been wrought in him is soon apparent. He is sure that God cares for Israelites and has a message to them; he is sure that a man is to be the bearer of that message. The new fire which has entered into his heart makes him ready to offer himself as that man; or rather, he feels that he is called, and that he must go; that a necessity is laid upon him, though his will has been made cheerful and ready to own that necessity, to go forth, not as a drudge, but as the herald of the only truth which was able to renovate his land.

But will it do that? A sadder commission than that one which followed, was never given to a man. "And He said, 'Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not, and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.'" How could a vision of the Divine King, with His seraphim crying, "Holy, holy, holy," be a preparation for such a message as this? Because the most awful lesson which Isaiah had to teach his people was, that God's own ordinances, the regular sequence of sovereigns, the duties and symbols of the temple, were contributing to make their eyes dim and their ears deaf and their hearts fat. They were seeing all the outward tokens of the presence of an invisible King; but they perceived not *Him*. They were hearing His words; but they did not hear Him speaking these words. They were worshipping in the presence of a Searcher of hearts, of a divine inspirer; and that very blessing was helping to close their hearts against His approaches and inspirations. A strange and fearful announcement indeed. Perhaps this which we find in the second chapter may explain it. " Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures. Their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols ; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself." There may have been actual idols of wood and stone in the high places which lasted through the days of Uzziah and Jotham. I do not say that the prophet does not allude to these. He must allude to every form of corruption which existed in the land. But I apprehend that here he is especially thinking of the silver and the gold, the chariots and the horses, as being themselves the idols to which the great men and the mean men were bowing down. These were the works of their own hands to which they were giving up their hearts. These had made their hearts fat and their ears dull of hearing. These had made the invisible world seem a dream, an unreality to them, the visible world the only fact. And to men in such a state of mind, so dulled and stupefied by the potions which they had administered to themselves, the most precious gifts of God, the instruments of His grace, the signs of His presence, became themselves potions. Those things which were meant to guide men out of darkness into light, from the world to its Creator, became a veil between Him and them, became the means of confounding Him with the world, or of substituting its shadows for His substance. Merely to see that there is such a law in human degeneracy as this, that the evil heart can so assimilate good to itself and convert it to its nature, is sufficiently appalling. To be obliged to proclaim it with all its consequences, is more appalling still. Only such a preparation as that Isaiah had gone through, could have enabled him to enter upon such a task or to fulfil it. But that did. For it made him understand that truth must be always good to hear and good to speak; that you cannot show a man his evil or a nation its evil, without declaring to both God's love and God's covenant; that if these be ever so little perceived by that age, there is yet a power in them which will go on blessing all ages to come; that he who speaks, cannot in the least measure the effect of his own words, but must leave them with God from whom they come, to do with them what He wills; finally, that He will make their power felt and prove their dominion in calamities which would be otherwise warrants for despair.

"Then said I, 'Lord, how long?' And He answered, 'Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.'" How long shall this insensibility and hardness of heart go on, increasing by every influence that should check it? The answer must have been crushing to the heart of a patriot, and yet it shows that the heaviest woe which could befall a land might be welcomed as a blessing. Some new kind of visitation, different from any which the chosen people had experienced, was at hand. It would be no onslaught of Philistines, no mere raid of Ammonites or Moabites or Syrians. The cities (we are not told what cities, but the impression on the prophet's mind must have been, that those of Judah as well as those of the other province were intended) would be wasted without inhabitant. It would not be a mere destruction of fortified places. The "houses" would be without inhabitant. Each particular family would feel the shock of the general war.

The land would be left unploughed and unsowed. There would not only be a slaughter in battles or sieges; "men would be moved far away." All these are warnings of an invasion and a captivity which would rouse those out of their slumbers whom no prophet's voice had been able to awaken.

"But yet in it shall be a tenth. And it shall return and shall be eaten, as a teil-tree or as an oak whose substance is in them when they cast their leaves. So the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." There is, I believe, no passage in the Scripture more important for the understanding of Isaiah and of all the prophets, than this one. It is very common to say that the Jewish seers announce destruction to the body of the Israelites; but that they promise blessings and preservation to certain individuals, a special remnant, the true Israel in the midst of the nominal Israel. Seeing that these true men would share of necessity a great many of the tribulations which befell their countrymen, seeing that some of them would be carried into captivity along with the most godless and heartless, and that others who were left behind would feel the consequences of the threatened desolation, and would have to mourn for much more than the loss of harvests, for the exiles and deaths of kinsfolk and children, it is concluded that the blessings promised them here are the blessings of a future world. Though they might suffer loss and a seeming death, they would have a hope full of immortality. Sharing the temporary calamities, they would escape the after doom of their countrymen. Whatever mixture of truth there may be in this interpretation (and the prophet may show us by and by what mixture of truth there is in it), I believe we shall utterly misunderstand him if we allow it to dwell in our minds while we are studying his words, — nay, if we do not receive, at the outset, the altogether different interpretation which he gives us himself. Consider his illustration. He does not say that the oak-tree or the teil-tree is stripped of certain of its leaves by a hurricane, and that it retains some of them which were stronger and more fixed than the rest. He speaks of the oak as utterly stripped, as quite bare, and yet retaining its substance, having within it some principle of life which enables it to last on and to send forth fresh leaves another year. In like manner, he says, the nation will be preserved; the remnant, the tenth, would be a pledge and witness of its preservation. The best men of that remnant, instead of boasting that they had avoided the sorrows of their country, would have the greatest sympathy with them, the least wish for some private and personal privilege. The worst part of them, — for there is no promise that bad men might not be in this remnant as well as among those who were carried away, — might exult in their escape, but would certainly not understand to whom they were indebted for it, or why it had been accorded them. But good or bad, their preservation would prove that the nation was a sacred and immortal thing, — because the holy seed was in the midst of it, because it did not derive its life or its unity from this or that believing man, or from a multitude of believing men, but from Him in whom they believed, from that Divine King who lived, though King Uzziah and all other kings died, — nay, though the whole land should seem to die.

I have gone carefully, brethren, through this chapter, because I believe that it leads us into the very heart of Isaiah's teaching, and that all the portions of it which we shall have to consider hereafter, are but expansions of the hints in this opening vision. He is often called the evangelical prophet; by which it is meant that he is especially the prophet of the Messiah. The language I believe is strictly true. Yet it is language which admits of various significations, and sometimes perhaps is used in a perverted signification. It is not enough to be told of a Messiah, a person sent from God; we want to know what manner of person *the* Messiah is, and how He is related to all others who have a divine mission as prophets or kings. Isaiah, I believe, will enable us to answer these questions, not, however, by merely predicting the advent of a Divine Ruler on some future day, but by showing how this Divine Ruler was *then* exercising the power which would afterwards be fully manifested. We must look for the Christ, not in some detached phrases or intimations of the prophecy, but as giving a purpose and unity to the whole of it; not as one who disturbs the order of history, and compels us to forget that we are reading of events which occurred in Isaiah's own day, but as one who explains those events and shows how they were steps in the evolutions of God's kingdom, exhibitions of the eternal laws which are established in it. Viewed in this light, the so-called Messianic aspects of Isaiah's discourses will never lead us to overlook the denunciation of the sins of the land at that time. They will only enable us to see more clearly the source and character of those sins, to see why they have reappeared, and are reappearing, in all generations and in all countries. Nor, again, will the prominence which is given to the kingly office by Isaiah ever throw into shadow the office of the prophet himself. We shall rather feel, what we have been learning imperfectly to feel from our previous readings, how essential each office is to the other, how there must be some One in whom they meet and harmonize. When we have understood the reality and universality of the truths for which the Jewish king, the Jewish priest, and the Jewish prophet, as joint representatives of the nation, were testifying, we shall understand better in what sense Isaiah speaks to Gentiles as well as Jews of punishments which would be common for both, of a deliverer for both, of the special insensibility and the special retribution which befall those who are intrusted with the privilege of knowing and declaring God, and who live in forgetfulness of Him. With this view of his character and work, we shall also be at no loss to perceive why the Assyrian invasion occupies so prominent a place in the visions of Isaiah, why it is in fact as truly the subject of his prophecy as Christ the Divine King is. For we shall find that he sees in that Assyrian invasion, not merely the sudden outburst of a new, mighty enemy against Jerusalem, not merely the punishment of Jews and of surrounding people, not merely a power which was to be defeated in the moment when victory seemed most certain; but the exhibition of that kind of kingdom which is antagonist in all times and in all its shapes to the kingdom of Him whose train filled the temple, and before whom the seraphim veiled their faces. Lastly, we shall find the idea of the continuance and everlasting endurance of that society which seemed on the point of perishing then, and has seemed often utterly to perish since, reconciled with the most dismal facts which the prophet saw or could not see; the king victorious through suffering, and bringing life out of death, being the key to that riddle, and to all riddles past, present, and to come.

These hints and observations I hope to draw out in two or three lectures upon the different sections of this great prophecy. In the mean time, I would fix your thoughts upon the passage which has suggested them. We have been hearing of a vision. Does that word sound as if it belonged to times which we have left far behind, as if it pointed to something fantastical and incredible? O, if there were no such visions, brethren, what an utterly dark and weary and unintelligible place this world would be! How completely we should be given up to the emptiest phantoms, to the basest worship of phantoms! What mere shows and mockeries would the state and ceremonial of kings, the debates of legislators, the yearnings and struggles of people, become! How truly would the earth be what it seemed to the worn-out misanthropical libertine, "A stage, and all the men and women merely players." A thousand times we have been all tempted to think it so. The same painted scenery, the same shifting pageants, the same unreal words spoken through different masks by counterfeit voices, the same plots which seem never to be unravelled, what does it all mean? How do men endure the ceaseless change, the dull monotony? Satirists and keen observers of the world's follies have asked this question again and again. The best man may often doubt what he should reply. But he hears a voice saying to him, "Try to be true thyself; resist the powers which are tempting thee to go through thy acts, common or sacred, as if thou wert a mere machine; hold fast thy faith, that God is and is working when thou seest least of His working, and when the world seems most to be going on without Him; assure thyself that there is an order in the universe when all its movements seem most disorderly. So will the things around thee by degrees acquire a meaning and a purpose. Those divine services and sacraments which have partaken of their insincerity, which have become shadows like them, will show thee what a truth and substance lies behind them. In English temples thou mayest hear "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of

Hosts!" resounding from the lips of seraphim. In them thou mayest know that thou art in the midst of a company of angels and archangels and just men made perfect, nay, that thou art in the presence of Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and of God the judge of all. And if the sense of that presence awaken all the consciousness of thine own evil, and of the evil of the people among whom thou dwellest, the taste of that sacrifice, which was once offered for thee and all the world, will purge thine iniquity. When that divine love has kindled thy flagging and perishing thoughts and hopes, thou mayest learn that God can use thee to bear the tidings of His love and righteousness to a sense-bound land that is bowing to silver and gold, to horses and chariots. And if there should come a convulsion in that land, such as neither thou nor thy fathers have known, be sure that it signifies the removal of such things as can be shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."

SERMON XIV.

ISAIAH AND AHAZ.

LINCOLN'S INN, 3D SUNDAY IN LENT. — MARCH 14, 1852.

Moreover, the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. But Ahaz said, I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord. And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David: Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.—ISAIAH vii. 10-14.

THE chapter from which this passage is taken immediately follows the one upon which I spoke to you last Sunday. The vision in the year that Uzziah died prepares us for the message of Ahaz. Nevertheless a considerable period — the whole reign of Jotham — elapsed between them. Are we to suppose that the lips which had been touched by the fire from the altar were silent during that time, that the man who had said, "Here am I, send me," and had received so terrible a message, did not deliver himself of it for sixteen years?

If that had been so, I do not know that there may not be many parallel cases in the ancient and modern world. A man may feel that he is called to a work long before the moment arrives when he can perform it, long before the outward event occurs which corresponds to the inward impulse and explains its full meaning.

Such intervals, no doubt, make great demands upon the faith and patience of him who is appointed to pass through them. There is the strongest temptation to doubt whether that which seemed to give a law and purpose to his life was not itself a dream. There is a temptation to create the occasion for speaking or acting before it arises. But the delay is an education which is profitable in proportion as the original inspiration and conviction are kept alive; it is necessary and often lengthened, in proportion as the subsequent work is to be of a powerful, terrible kind, such as may affect generations to come. If the opinion which has been ordinarily deduced from St. Paul's account of his stay in Arabia, in the Epistle to the Galatians, be a true one, he would offer the most memorable example of this probation.

There is no reason, however, to suppose that Isaiah was silent during the time I have spoken of. There is the best evidence that he was not. What we may, I think, fairly affirm is, that the events in the reign of Ahaz, to which I alluded in a former lecture, the conspiracy against him by the Samaritans and Syrians, the appearance of the Assyrian hosts in Palestine, the entreaty of Ahaz that Tiglath Pileser would punish his enemies, the fulfilment of that petition, and the consequent preparation of a new and fearful calamity for his son and his people, were the especial objects to which Isaiah's vision pointed, and that the prophecy contained in the text derives great part of its interpretation from that vision. It is equally true, that the connection between them would not be intelligible, if the purged eyes of the prophet had not been enabled to see the condition of society in Judea, in the years of apparent prosperity and splendor which preceded the league of Pekah and Rezin, and if he had not given us a most vivid and graphical description of that which he saw.

The first chapter of his prophecy can hardly be said to contain this description. The words at the commencement of it, — "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me; the ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider," — might apply to Jotham's time or any other. I hinted, last Sunday, that they served as a kind of general preface to the prophecy, indicating what the sin was against which all the after denunciations of the seer would be directed; how it was the revolt of a people from One who cared for them, watched over them, loved them; how it was the wild and wilful desire of the heart to seek abroad for the treasures which it would have found stored up at home. Something of the same general character may be traced through the rest of the chapter. But there are passages such as these, — "Your country is desolate, your cities are burnt with fire, your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate as overthrown by strangers; and the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city," — which must, it would seem, refer to a much later time, when either Shalmaneser or Sennacherib had laid waste the greater part of Palestine, and when Jerusalem was nearly the last hold of the chosen race. Some may feel a difficulty in connecting the following passages, which declare that their condition would have been like that of Sodom and Gomorrah if the Lord had not preserved a very small remnant, with the time in which Hezekiah was reigning, after he had commenced a great reformation. But we may find, as we proceed, what all reason and experience would lead us to expect, that this reformation was slow in its progress, that it brought to light evils which were lying very deep in the heart of the nation, that some of the immediate household of the king (Shebna, the scribe, is denoted by name as one of them) fully deserved to be called "companions of thieves, men who loved gifts and followed after rewards, who judged not the cause of the fatherless." And the reaction in favor of the temple services and the appointed feasts, which was sure to follow the change in the disposition of the king, may have led to that semblance of faith which the prophet denounces in the words, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord; I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats"; together with that cry for an inward and radical reformation, "Wash you. Make you clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Seek judgment. Relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless; plead for the widow." And the promises, at the end of the chapter, that the city should become once more a city of righteousness, a faithful city, point naturally to that higher and nobler state of things which was to be seen in the latter years of Hezekiah's reign, after the ministers of corruption had been swept away, and the truer hearts had been purified by suffering.

But the most intelligent students of Isaiah have believed, and apparently on the most reasonable grounds, that the *next* passage of his prophecy, from the beginning of the second to the end of the fourth chapter, belongs to the very commencement of his work. There had been many allusions in earlier prophets — we have noticed one in Joel — to a time of great blessedness and glory, when Mount Zion should be exalted above the hills, and the law of the Lord should go forth from Jerusalem. Such sentences we may easily suppose had become texts and commonplaces among the people, often in the mouths of the popular and court prophets, applied by them to the state of things which was then established, or to some one which would naturally grow out of it. A passage of this kind, it is supposed, — and the hypothesis gives great coherency to the whole discourse, — is to be found in the second, third, and fourth verses of the second chapter. Adopting words which were well known to his audience, from some venerable teacher of the past, the prophet proceeds to comment upon them, and show that they might indeed have been fulfilled in that time, but that the sins of the nation had produced a state as unlike as possible to that which the seer spoke of.

No contrast can be more living and terrible than that which the prophet draws between the actual condition of things and that true and blessed one which he as much as his predecessor looks for. The first sign of corruption is that they were replenished from the east, and pleased themselves in the children of strangers. In other words, they had a love for all foreign habits, luxuries, superstitions. Above all, they had acquired a taste for enchantments, a delight, and — if it were not profaning the word — a faith, in auguries drawn from visible portents, — in whatever wonders did not testify of a God of order. This sure and fatal symptom of a people indifferent to realities, occupied with self-exalting vanities, stood side by side with the tokens of which I spoke last Sunday, the multitude of chariots and horses, the abundance of silver and gold, the practical worship of these which produced all other more obvious kinds of idolatry. Before that bright day of the Lord can come, about which the old prophet had spoken, a day must come which would wither and consume all these vanities; "a day which shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and he shall be brought low; on the cedars of Lebanon and the oaks of Bashan; on the high towers and the fenced walls; upon the ships of Tarshish and the pleasant pictures." "A day in which a man shall cast his idols of silver and of gold to the moles and to the bats, to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His Majesty, when He shall arise to shake terribly the earth."

And there would be judgments preparatory to these. "The Lord would take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the prudent and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honorable man, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And children should be their princes, and babes should rule over them." The last sentence may allude to Ahaz, who, as we are told in the Book of Kings, was only twenty years old when he began to reign, and whose acts showed that he was a child in character even more than in years. His father might be declining and the boy exhibiting his character when the prophet wrote. The next passage alludes, of course, to the removal of old counsellors either by death or by the caprice of the young king. And this want of all wisdom and power of government in the ruler leads to the next sign of disorganization, or at least is almost inevitably coincident with it. "The people shall be oppressed every one by another, and every one by his neighbor. The child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable." There will come also a time to Jerusalem, Isaiah declares, when the craving for power, and even covetousness itself, will give place to the dread of responsibility and shame; when people shall say to a man, "Thou hast clothing; be thou our ruler. And he shall swear, 'I will not be a healer. Make me not a ruler of the people.'" Another sign of a falling state Isaiah draws out with the minuteness and detail which are characteristic of a prophet. "The daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched-out necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go"; filled with a thoughtless, heartless, self-seeking spirit, which was bringing on a day that would rob them of all that they had delighted in, and would make them sharers in the misery which they had not heeded. These are evils, the prophet says, which must be washed away, nay, which require a spirit of judgment and a spirit of burning to remove them. And *then* will the good day come; "*then* will the Lord give His people a tabernacle for a shadow from the heat, and a place of refuge from storm and from rain."

This noble discourse is followed by the song concerning the Lord's vineyard, which probably belongs to the same period of the history. The vineyard is on a very fruitful hill, it has been fenced, the stones have been gathered out of it, the choicest vine has been planted in it, a tower has been built in the midst of it, a winepress has been made in it. The owner of it looked that it should bring forth grapes; and it brought forth wild grapes. That truth is here asserted in the strongest manner which penetrates the whole prophecy, and apart from which no word of it has any meaning, that the nation of Israel was brought into an entirely right state; that it was *wholly a right seed;* that it had all capacities and appliances for being right and for doing right; that when it brought forth wild grapes, it was severing itself from its root; it was doing something disorderly, irregular, in one sense of the word, unnatural. The use of the phrase *wild* grapes shows, indeed, that it was yielding to the impulses of nature. But then the very idea of a covenanted people is of one raised above these impulses, brought into the true human condition, the condition of dependence upon God which He intends for the creature whom He has made in His image. The prophet here, as always, does not rest in generalities. He tells us what the wild grapes are which the vineyard has brought forth, what signs the house of Judah has given that it is yielding to nature, not to God, and so is becoming unnatural and inhuman. The possessors of land come first in his arraignment. "Woe to them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth." Then come the luxurious men of cities. "Woe to them that rise up early in the morning that they may follow strong drink, that continue until night till wine inflame them. And the harp, and the viol, and the tabret, and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they consider not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of His hands." Then we have the scorners, those who do not believe that any judgment can overtake them, who think that every thing is as it ought to be and as it must be. They say, "Let Him make speed and hasten His work that we may see it. And let the covenant of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh that we may know it." Then those who use false conventional phrases to describe acts and qualities, or who deny a standard of right and wrong. "Woe to them who call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness." Then those that glory in their wisdom or their righteousness. "Woe to them that are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight." Then, again, those that boast of their sottishness, and who yet retain enough of sense and cleverness to abuse it for the purposes of injustice. "Woe to them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink, which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him." And there is one general cause of ruin which the prophet looks upon as comprehending all these particular causes. My people are in captivity or bondage, because they have no *knowledge*. The sensuality, the covetousness, the self-glorification, the practical disregard of right and wrong in their dealings with each other, are destroying all faculty of moral discernment, and making them brutish and slavish. Their honorable men and the multitude become alike incapable of recognizing a law of Truth and Righteousness as governing themselves, and therefore of believing in a God of Truth and Righteousness, who is the author and upholder of that law. "They do not know, they cannot understand," — these are phrases occurring continually in the prophets to describe the extinction of that perception in a nation which is the proper attribute of man, and the consequent triumph of all mere animal propensities, together with a resolute, deliberate selfishness, which is not found among animals, but only among fallen spirits.

It has been supposed that there are many passages scattered through the later chapters of Isaiah which may belong to the same period with these, another principle than a chronological one having apparently determined the arrangement of his utterances. But the specimens I have given will be quite sufficient to explain the crisis in which the prophet received the following command.

"Then said the Lord unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the highway of the fuller's field; and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal; thus saith the Lord God, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people. And the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established."

You might have supposed, in such a time as that which has been described to us, that the prophet would have spoken to Ahaz of coming danger, rather than have cheered him to confidence and hope. Was this fulfilling his commission? Was this in the spirit of that discourse wherein he had told them that there must be a dark terrible day of the Lord before any brightness could be looked for? I conceive that Isaiah could not have explained the import of the divine vision which he saw in the temple, or of the warnings and threatenings which the sins of the people had drawn forth from him, so effectually as by this exhortation to faith, undoubted faith, in the divine covenant with the house of David. He had been shown the ground for this faith, how certainly a Divine King was in the midst of the people from generation to generation; *with* them, while one visible ruler after another was taken from them. Confidence in the calling of the family, — in its preservation, — was really confidence in Him; its succession existed to testify of Him. And want of this confidence would indicate as surely that the belief in the unseen Ruler was failing or had disappeared; it would be the natural consequence of all those habits which Isaiah had denounced as ominous of coming destruction. Here was a test of the condition of the king and the kingdom. Did he think that his house would fall before the son of Tabeal? It was clear, then, that the promises to David seemed to him mere fantasies or fictions; he despised his birthright; he did not know that his race was chosen for any high and divine purpose by the Lord of the whole earth. The courage which had enabled Moses to lead the people through the desert, Joshua with his little bands to drive out the nations, the judges one after another to deliver their country from its oppressors, grew out of this faith; when the effect ceased, it was clear the cause had ceased; cowardice was another name for distrust. And it was certain that distrust in an invisible power would involve silly slavish confidence in some visible power. If Ahaz did not say to the Guide and Deliverer of his land, Save me, I am thy servant and son, he would offer that prayer and confession to the Assyrian.

Here lies the first obvious explanation of the words which I took for my text. Isaiah is desired to offer Ahaz a sign, either in the depth or the height. That the Jewish economy was in some sense an economy of signs, we all admit. I have striven in former lectures to ascertain in *what* sense. *We* are not surely authorized to say that we see no signs. What are all outward appearances but signs of some power or principle which is working unseen? What is the function of the physical student or philosopher, but to discover the power or principle of which any appearances or facts in nature are the indexes? What is the function of the political or moral student, but to ascertain of what power or principle any appearances or facts of individual experience or general history are the indexes? The Jewish prophet was to call the attention of his countrymen to these signs, to discover the signification of them. For the more effectual carrying out of this purpose, he was directed sometimes to *make* signs; he was empowered to do some unusual thing, that men might be stirred by it to inquire for the purpose which was latent in it. In this respect, too, he was a guide to future ages in understanding what befalls them. Rare appearances and acts must have their law, as well as those that are more regular; they rouse the attention of the torpid, they fulfil their part in the great scheme of man's education. Our Lord laid down the whole doctrine upon this subject when the Pharisees sought a sign from Him. He had given them signs of healing, life-giving power, proofs that a present God was with them. But they wanted a sign from Heaven, the token of some distant God in the sky. That, He said, was the craving of an adulterous or sense-bound generation; and He asked them whether there were not signs in the sky at morning and evening by which they determined whether there would be a fine or a cloudy day on the morrow, and whether there were not signs of the times which were warning them of evils to come. The new world has been just as rich in these signs as the old. But God's mercy to the old in giving them special clews to the purpose and moral of his signs, will save us from the wish to have any other phenomena than those which testify of His regular and daily government. If we do not use these, we may have others;

but it will be because we are an adulterous and sinful generation, and need the portents and presages of an approaching downfall.

Ahaz said, "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord my God." It was an hypocritical phrase: he did not fear to tempt the Lord his God, he did not believe Him. He feared lest the prophet should show him some terrible sights, such as those an enchanter would have shown him. He feared lest the God of his fathers should do him some injury. "O house of David," said Isaiah, "is it not enough for you to weary man, but will you weary my God also?" You have worn out the patience of men; but do you think that you can wear out the patience of God? Do you think you can change His purposes, because you are incredulous and heartless? No; "the Lord Himself shall give you a sign. A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel."

It is added in the next verse but one: "Before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings." These words, introduced so distinctly, compel us, if we would not utterly set aside the letter of Scripture, to believe that a child was born shortly after this time, either of the royal stock or to the prophet. There are probabilities in each interpretation. There is no warrant at all (as we are told nothing further upon the subject) for supposing that the birth, though it may have been unlooked for, was in the sense we commonly give to the word miraculous. We cannot anticipate an after and more glorious event by supposing the exact parallel of it to have occurred now. But we are bound to suppose, because we are expressly told so, that *an* event, which was the sign to Ahaz that the enemies whom he feared would be destroyed, actually occurred.

"And they shall call his name Emmanuel." The name of the child was to intimate that God was with them. The name takes great possession of the prophet's mind. It becomes a sort of key-word with him. You would expect it to be so. The King whose train filled the temple was the God with us, the Divine Teacher, the present Deliverer, the everlasting Word, to whom kings did homage, who spoke by prophets. All visible kings Isaiah regards as signs of Him. All prophets live to make Him known. But there were events preparing for the land of their fathers which made it needful that His Name should be declared with especial emphasis, which assured the prophet that there would be a more complete revelation of His Majesty than had been made yet. "The Lord shall bring upon thee," he said to Ahaz, "and upon thy people and upon thy father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria." This visitation, which begins to be announced now with a breadth and distinctness befitting its near approach, does not involve merely the coming of one host. It has been well said, that Palestine occupied for some ages a place in Oriental history, not unlike that which the Low Countries have occupied in modern Europe. It was not merely exposed to the attacks of a single power: it was a battle-field between two. "The Lord," it is said, "shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes." It is added, that, "in that day, where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silverlings, it shall be for briers and thorns."

From this time we may observe a continual recurrence of these two ideas, frequently in direct conjunction, always following close upon each other, — the Assyrian invader, and the Emmanuel, the God with us. In the following chapter, the birth of a son to the pophet is carefully recorded as a sign. " For before the child shall have knowledge to cry 'My father' and 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria." But though this punishment is especially denounced against the two confederate nations, it is added, " He shall pass through Judah. And the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Emmanuel." Then he bids the Syrians and Israelites "take counsel together, but it shall come to naught. Speak the word, and it shall not stand; for God is with us." He declares that " the Lord will be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." He speaks of himself and the children whom God has given him; where, by children, he seems not only to mean the one who had been lately born to him and the one who accompanied him on his message to Ahaz, though these are certainly included; but the prophetical school by which he was surrounded, those whom he calls in the sixteenth verse his disciples. All these were to be living signs, continual testimonies, of an impending ruin and of a great Deliverer, of One to whom every Israelite might turn with his heart, and in whom he might find rest and salvation; but whose presence would stir up all the dark and evil and rebellious thoughts of those who would not yield themselves to Him.

I purposely abstain from entering upon the memorable passage which opens the ninth chapter; which, like the one I have been considering to-day, is associated with our Christmas recollections and thanksgivings. Perhaps you will feel that I have done something to weaken that application of the words which were spoken to Ahaz. By taking them in connection with the falling and rising again of many in Israel in Isaiah's day, I may seem to have denied the truth of St. Matthew's sentence, "Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet: Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which is, being interpreted, God with us." I hope and trust that I have rather been helping you to see the full power and exact truth of that sentence. If Isaiah gave this sign to Ahaz because he doubted whether the promise would be fulfilled to David, that his seed should be established for ever, the sign could not be *fulfilled*, that is to say, the perfect meaning of it could not be realized, unless One should be raised upon his throne, of whose kingdom there should be no end. If the wonderful promise had been made to David on the day when he sat before the Lord and meditated on His gracious covenant, "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son," the king he expected could only perfectly fulfil the sign, provided He were the Son of God. If He were to be the Son of God, and yet to be an actual child, eating ordinary human food, learning like other children to "choose the good and refuse the evil," brought up under actual human guidance, then the sign would only be fulfilled if an actual virgin conceived and bore a son. And yet again, if this son was He whose goings forth had been of old, from everlasting, the sign could only be fulfilled provided He were *then* the Emmanuel, the God with us, in whom Isaiah could bid Ahaz trust, in whom he trusted himself, the testimony of whom he bequeathed to his children and his disciples.

We must be content to see the idea of this Divine Person evolving itself slowly in the mind of the prophet; now one aspect of His character, now another, presenting itself to him as he mused and sorrowed and hoped for himself and for his country and for mankind. And, dear brethren, we must be content that the knowledge of Him should evolve itself slowly in our minds; we must be thankful if any perplexities and sorrows, from within or from without, prepare us for it. The Name of Him who was born of the Virgin may be familiar to us, it may be surrounded with many beautiful and venerable associations, it may recall moments of youthful tenderness, or remorse, or enthusiasm. And yet it may rather hover about our minds than be rooted in them; we may be trying by acts of memory, or fancy, or strong, passionate efforts of what we call faith, to bind it to us more closely. What we want, I think, is to know the barrenness and hollowness of our own selves. If there is not some One beneath ourselves, the ground of all that we desire and believe and are, the spring of our hopes and the consummation of them, the fountain of all love in every creature and the satisfaction of its love, life is a very miserable sleep, full of turbulent, broken dreams, mixed with a strange dread of awaking. It is in vain that men seek to soothe us with outward images and pleasant pictures. There is a presence near us and within us that cannot be put by. It haunts us, waylays us, torments us. It is indeed a rock of stumbling and a stone of offence to us. The consciousness of it produces irritation and fever. It seems as if all outward nature presented it to us in dark signs and hieroglyphics that we cannot decipher. But if we have once courage to ask boldly, "Who art Thou that wilt not leave me wherever I am, or whatever I am doing, whose voice I cannot silence, whose eye will not cease to look into me?"—the awful form of the judge and the accuser will be seen to change into the gracious form of the sympathizing Friend and Brother. And as the face becomes better known, without losing this human aspect, still bearing all the traces, deeper than ever, of birth and poverty, of sorrow and death, it will yet be seen to be royal and divine; we shall be sure that the Man is the King; and the King will be the Emmanuel, God with us;—not with one of us only, but with all of us;—most real, though the eye cannot see Him; certainly near, though the heart do not confess Him;—He in whom alone we are all men and all brothers; in whom alone our Father can behold us, and we Him.

When we have learnt to live in this conviction, or rather when God, by giving us perpetual experiences of our own failures, and follies, and vanities, has made it impossible for us to live in any other, then we shall not need signs in the height or the depth that He will put down our enemies. *Quid times? Cæsarem vehis,*—The Son of God is in the vessel,—will be an answer to all suggestions of the cowardly nature within us that the Father of Spirits will desert the work of His own hands. "Associate yourselves and ye shall be broken in pieces, powers of darkness and evil! for God is with us." And we shall desire and hope that we and the children whom God has given us may be signs to the world of His kingdom and His victory. The commonest birth into the world will be a wonder, since He has been born into it. The continuance of every family, in spite of its sins and strifes, will speak of Him as the Everlasting Brother, even as the endurance of the earth itself, amidst all that is shaking it, will bear witness that He sitteth above the water-floods, a King for ever.

SERMON XV.

THE LIGHT IN DARKNESS.

Lincoln's Inn, 4th Sunday in Lent. — March 21, 1852.

Nevertheless, the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, and not increased the joy: they joy before thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For thou hast broken the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian. For every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood; but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. — Isaiah ix. 1 – 7.

The separation of Israel from Judah reached its consummation in the time of Ahaz. The confederacy of the Samaritans with the Syrians against Judah was encountered by the confederacy of Judah with Assyria against Israel. It was no mere border war. Each sought the extermination of the other. These confederacies betokened the spirit which was at the root of all the crimes which Isaiah had deplored and denounced. The acknowledgment of a common king had bound the tribes together, so long as that implied the acknowledgment of a common God. Idolatry had broken the tie and had kept them asunder. But the present scheme of Samaria to extinguish its rival, even at the cost of giving an ascendency to the uncircumcised king of Damascus, showed clearly enough that the last link of brotherhood was broken, because the last feeling of the Divine calling, which had made them a nation of brothers, was gone. The more plausible, really more insane, desire of Ahaz to secure the favor of an empire which was the common enemy of all nations, that he might get rid of the two which were tormenting him, showed that faith had departed from Judah also. The idols of silver and gold had driven God out of its heart, and made the worship of Him a mockery.

It was at this time that Isaiah's child was born. He received it, we have seen, as a sign and wonder from the Lord of Hosts. It was a sign of the coming fall of Samaria and Damascus. Before the child had knowledge to cry, " My father and mother," the spoils of both would be taken away before the king of Assyria. But that prospect, however cheering it might have been to Ahaz if he had believed Isaiah, would only have oppressed the prophet himself.

The destruction of a part of the covenant people, even the destruction of any nation, was to him an awful event. Had this been all, the child would have been an omen of evil, not of good. But something was awakened in his mind by the sight of it, and by all the affections and sympathies that accompanied it, which lifted him to a higher and securer ground of confidence for the land and for himself. Laws and principles were connected with that relation of child and father, which he could dimly discern, not measure or understand. Truths which did not stand aloof from him, which were associated with his own being, had their root and ground somewhere else. A ladder which was set upon earth reached to heaven, and it was one upon which the angels of God might descend and ascend.

The prophet had need of this new strength to bear the gloomy visions, which pressed more and more heavily upon him, of a people hardly bested and hungry, who would fret themselves and curse their king and God and look upward; of a people who, in their despair of any divine help, would turn to wizards that peeped and muttered, — "of a people who would then look upon the earth, and behold trouble and darkness and dimness of anguish, and who should be driven into darkness." This prostration of all moral strength and hope, this utter dreariness of spirit, is just what was to be augured of men like the Israelites of the north, who had given themselves up to vanities and delusions, who had believed a lie and worshipped it. And why should the hypocritical Judah, with her unbelieving king, sink into a darkness less utter.

"Nevertheless," says the prophet, "the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterwards did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

It is clearly indicated here that a body of Israelites, who in other comparatively light visitations had remained shut out from the privilege of their countrymen, a set of border outcasts, consigned to Heathenism, should now in this *more* troublous time, when the whole people seemed likely to share their fall and exclusion, receive a new and sudden illumination. The hour of utter dislocation and dissolution, when, in the prophet's language, "they were eating every one the flesh of his own arm," when Manasseh was against Ephraim and Ephraim against Manasseh, and both together against Judah; — in that hour would there be some unlooked for testimony that they were all one people. Some light from Heaven, penetrating the darkest corners of the land, would show that it was still a Holy Land. If you turn to the thirtieth chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, you will see that between the invasion of Tiglath Pileser and that of Shalmaneser, — when a great body of the Israelites had been carried captive and the power of the Assyrian Empire had been fully realized, but while they were still dwelling in their old cities and allowed to claim Samaria as a capital, — an event occurred which must have seemed strange and wonderful to all the tribes, but especially to those Zebulunites and Naphtalites in whom the idea of a covenant, the sense of kindred and race, had so nearly perished.

"And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation. So they established a decree, to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beer-sheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the Lord God of Israel at Jerusalem; for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the Lord God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary, which He hath sanctified for ever; and serve the Lord your God, that the fierceness of His wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the Lord, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the Lord your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you, if ye return unto him. So the posts passed from city to city, through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless divers of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah, the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation. And they arose, and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt-offerings into the house of the Lord. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites: for there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified; therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the Lord. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written: but Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people. And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the Lord day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the Lord. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace-offerings, and making confession to the Lord God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days; and they kept other seven days with gladness. For Hezekiah, king of Judah, did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the

Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon, the son of David king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem."

You will remark the many curious coincidences between this passage and the one which is before us, and you will ask yourselves, whether an Israelite acquainted with the words of Isaiah could possibly fail to connect them in some way or other with this memorable act of Hezekiah.

But would he therefore be authorized to say that the next clause of my text applies to Hezekiah, — "For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder"? Words follow which may well make us tremble at such an interpretation. And yet, with the facts which show that in the days of this prince a greater calamity was preparing for both Samaria and Judah than any which had ever befallen them, and that just then there was to be this invitation of all the tribes to a union which they had not known for generations, — this actual acceptance of it by some, — this divine pledge in the old national feast that God Himself intended it for them all, — I cannot think that we are justified in setting aside the reference to Hezekiah as blasphemous, till we have thoroughly considered what such a reference could imply.

The peculiarity of Hezekiah's act was this. He did not, like Rehoboam, Amaziah, or any of his predecessors, seek to recover the ten tribes to himself as part of his possession and appanage, because he was the heir of David. He did not treat them as mere revolters, who if they would not submit to him must be left to their own courses. Nor, on the other hand, did he, like Jehoshaphat, make alliances with them in spite of their idolatry. What he did was to claim one and all of them as children of God's covenant; as entitled to a share in the feast which declared that they were delivered from Pharaoh and brought under a divine and gracious government. All past grudges and offences were forgotten. The civil objection, that they were once in rebellion, and had become corrupted in blood by long adherence to rebellion, was cast aside. The religious objection, that the worship of calves and of Baal had cut them off from their ancient rights, that they had in effect made themselves heathens, was overcome even in the instances where the proof in favor of it appeared most decisive and overwhelming. Even the divinely ordained formalities for the festival were not allowed to stand in the way. They had not cleansed themselves. "They ate otherwise than it was written." Still Hezekiah prayed, "The good Lord pardon every one."

What would be the result of such a noble, unselfish policy upon the minds of those who heeded the call to the Passover, — ultimately, perhaps, in after days of humiliation and captivity, on the minds of many who mocked at it? They would at once be led back, the king being their guide, to thoughts of another King than him, of One at whose words the hosts of the oppressor had sunk like lead in the mighty waters, who had gone with them through the wilderness, who had claimed them as a people of inheritance to Himself. Conceive a race sitting in great darkness, not less idolatrous than the people among whom they dwelt, but with a vague sense of being separated from them by some peculiar traditions and external signs, which made a hearty participation in their idolatry impossible, — a people which had the lowest, basest, most frightful notions of some unseen power whom they ought if possible to propitiate, either by Phœnician rites, or by some half-remembered, miserably distorted forms which their fathers had taught them, — conceive such a people sunk in hopelessness, sensuality, slavery, hearing the message that the God of their fathers was seeking after them, was inviting them to join with all their kinsmen and countrymen in praising Him as their past and present deliverer, the God who would remain the same, though the earth should melt and the foundation of the hills should be dissolved. It is difficult to find any language sufficient for such an occasion. This Gospel was the revelation of a God to this poor, degraded people, one most unlike any in whom they had believed, yet not a new God, the very God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the very one of whom their consciences testified in the midst of their sensuality and idolatry. It was the revelation of a fellowship with a people whom they had looked upon as enemies, to a set of men who had never known what fellowship was among themselves; yet who had a thousand tokens in their domestic relations, even in their ordinary occupations, most of all in the deep yearnings of their hearts, that they were not meant for isolation, rivalry, hostility.

Supposing, then, the prophet were merely speaking of the light which Hezekiah diffused among these ignorant people, his words could not be limited to Hezekiah. Hezekiah could not be the Light, though he might bear witness of the Light. The very wonder of the people would be, that he was not exalting his own power over them, that he was not plotting to bring them under his yoke, but was claiming them as the subjects of One to whom he himself did homage.

They would feel, indeed, that in this act he was exhibiting the rarest example of kingly grace they had ever known; but only because he was the image of some higher King, in whom that grace must dwell more completely, from whom it must flow forth more abundantly. A like impression would communicate itself to the people who did acknowledge Hezekiah as their sovereign. One can well believe the statement of the historian, that no Passover had ever been celebrated with the gladness of heart with which that was celebrated. In the ordinary temple services which Hezekiah had restored, there may still have been a great mixture of formality, self-righteousness, hypocrisy. They may have been performed merely in obedience to the precept of the king, because it was the fashion to perform them, or because they marked the difference between themselves and the calf-worshippers of Samaria. But a feast to which they came simply because the Lord God of Israel had called them to it, as Israelites, casting aside their local prejudices and distinctions, will have unfolded in them that sense of an unseen and common Deliverer, which would enable them to eat the lamb, first, indeed, with the bitter herbs of penitence for their unbelief and separation, but afterwards with united blessing and thanksgiving.

But will Isaiah himself have been tempted to identify the child that was given to the land with the son of Ahaz? I apprehend he may have perceived in him, whilst still a youth, much promise of after good, signs perhaps of sorrow at the alliance which his father was making with Assyria, and dislike to the new altar and the degraded worship which he and his priest Urijah were introducing into Jerusalem. Or, if he was too young and too humble to discover this disgust, yet Isaiah may have seen in him tokens of a sincere and earnest spirit, a determination to do right and resist such temptations as a young prince was exposed to, a love for his country's history, a belief in the glory that was destined for it. These would be warrants for hope. The prophet might have the strongest divine assurance that this youth was destined to do what the youth for whom Virgil prayed to the gods of his country was not destined to do, —

> "Everso succurrere sæclo."

All these observations and indications would be present to the prophet's mind when he meditated upon the present and future condition of his land. His heavenly Teacher would bring them before him. They would give him a warrant for exclaiming, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given. And the government shall be upon his shoulder." But Hezekiah could as little represent the thoughts with which the prophet's mind was big, as the little infant who had been given to himself could. *That* we may be sure was at least as near his recollection and his heart, as the royal youth, even if this youth was his scholar. And neither separately, but both together, will have helped to bring out, in its fulness and power, the truth which was needed for his land and for himself, the truth which had been partially made known to him in his vision in the temple, which had been deepened by his message to Ahaz, which enabled him to understand how the union of Israelites might spring out of their worst divisions, how a new birth might come out of death.

The growing youth was the type of a regenerated royal race, the prophet's child of a regenerated nation. But were these pledges and types merely addressed to the fancy? Were they merely soothing suggestions, which might keep alive a hope soon to be crushed utterly by facts? No, for the original stock of royalty was not David; the nation did not derive its vitality from Abraham. There was a divine stock, an eternal seed, out of which both had proceeded. That stock could not wear out, that seed could never become less vital or germinant than it had been. The words, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given," were the rapturous εὕρηκα of the prophet when this truth had dawned with full power on his spirit. But that spirit at once confesses that the truth has been *given;* the search may have been long, the travail hard, but God was Himself leading him on to the discovery. And what a discovery! Beneath the infinite confusion into which the land had fallen there lay a principle of unity which nothing could break or destroy. That is our cold, hard, unreal phraseology. Isaiah could use words that were true and living. The principle is a *Person;* the centre of unity is a *Son;* the government is on His shoulders; He is an actual King. His name is Secret or Wonderful; the eye sees Him not; the heart owns Him with awe and confusion; He is the Counsellor, the source of Wisdom, the spring of all intuition and all discourse; the discerner of intents, the guide to acts. He is, — it must be spoken, — "He can be, none else than the Mighty God, the Creator of Man," — He who said, Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness. He it is who imparts to the generations of men that fixedness which man owns amidst all the transitoriness and vicissitudes that he experiences. "He is the Father of the everlasting age." And lastly — for thus we end where we began — He is the Prince of Peace, the bond of that fellowship which all the wilfulness of kings and the disorders of tribes could not sever.

This centre of unity Isaiah opposes to all the petty, paltry confederacies which the tribes were forming against each other. They would all be broken in pieces. A sweeping whirlwind would carry them all away. But here was a safe resting-place for the hopes of all true Israelites; here was a certain assurance of revival amidst the confusion of parties, amidst the utter failure of human leaders. Not some great champion suddenly appearing cheered the soul of the prophet. Champions were gone. Isaiah had seen every staff broken upon which the people might lean. The birth of a child in weakness into an unintelligible, distracted world, was the symbol of triumph; for that showed that the Son of God was Himself come down to the battle-field, that He was gathering together the hosts, few and feeble in the eyes of man, which were to avenge the cause of Israel.

When I say *the Son of God*, I do not mean to pronounce how far Isaiah was conscious whether the title "Son" referred to a human or a divine parentage. The truth had dawned upon him, that there must be One intimately related to God, and also the Lord and Prince of His Nation, One who bore up the pillars of the earth, though those who were called the children of the Most High were dealing madly and were to die like men. It required fresh sorrows, fresh revelations, to bring that truth into perfect clearness in his mind, to show that the Son of God must in the fullest sense be the Son of Man. We must not anticipate the gradual unfolding of so mighty a conviction, which, if it is really to dwell in every heart, must penetrate all its other thoughts and beliefs, and subordinate them to itself. Least of all must we complain if the prophet passes from a glorious announcement which concerns all times, — us more than himself, — to the local incidents and troubles that were affecting his own generation. If we do not care to follow him when he denounces Samaritans, who say, "The bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones; the sycamores are fallen down, but we will change them into cedars";—if we think it signifies nothing to us whether or not Manasseh vexes Ephraim or Ephraim Manasseh;—if we would pass over the description of the Assyrian hosts and the exposition of the Divine purpose in sending them against a hypocritical nation;—if we see no force or comfort in the declaration that the tyrant of the earth fancied he had a power of his own to cut down the trees of Lebanon, whereas he was but the axe with which God was hewing them;—if we pass by all these utterances, that we may dwell on some favorite passage like that of which I have been speaking to-day, or like that in the eleventh chapter which describes the lamb and the lion feeding together,—we shall, I fear, lose the full and true meaning of the sentences which we have chosen for our exclusive, certainly not for our exaggerated, admiration. If we adopt the headings which divines or printers have affixed to our chapters, and determine that such and such a paragraph denotes the flourishing state of the kingdom of Christ, we may extract from them a kind of meaning,—we *shall* extract the indication of an excellent meaning; but I am afraid that we shall go away with a very loose notion of this kingdom, of what makes its state weak or flourishing, of the relation in which our own times or our own selves stand to it. Whereas, if we had allowed the prophet to teach us how he had acquired his lore respecting a divine king and a divine kingdom, I believe we should understand infinitely better in what way his prophecies relate to after periods in the life of the Church and of the world, and how it has pleased God to educate one and another into the knowledge of Himself.

If you consider the application which St. Matthew makes of the words, "The people which sat in darkness have seen a great light, and to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up," you will find how much the thoughts in Isaiah's mind respecting the divisions of his land and the heathenism of a great part of it, help to explain our Lord's teaching and work, as well as to unfold the mystery of His person. He went into the further coasts of Zebulun and Naphtali, to that Galilee of the nations of which Isaiah had spoken; so, says St. Matthew, his words were fulfilled. Just as the summons to the Passover taught the outcasts in these regions, seven hundred years before, that they were the children of the divine covenant for whom the unseen Ruler of the land cared; so did the appearance of Jesus among them, and His words and acts of love, break down the barriers which the Pharisee had raised between them and himself, and claim all Galileans and Samaritans, publicans and harlots, for members of a flock which the chief Shepherd loved, and the poorest sheep of which He would go into the wilderness to seek and to fetch home. The voice which spoke to them was mighty because the heart and conscience confessed that it was a divine voice. The light which shined upon the people of Zebulun and Naphtali, half heathen now as in the days of old, was that light which lightens every man who comes into the world. It was the light which Pharisees and Scribes must own, if they would not sink into deepest darkness, and which, if they did own it, would show them that every publican and sinner was their brother.

And if we, brethren, would know who Christ is, and what he was come into the world to do, we must feel the strifes which rend asunder the Church Universal, our own nation, every family, every man in it, as Isaiah felt those which tore Ephraim from Manasseh and set them both against Judah. We are not to learn — we cannot learn — who He is from books, however precious they may be, — not even from the book which contains the Revelation of Him, — unless we are content that God should reveal Him to us as He did to His chosen servants and teachers. And thus this blessed revelation may come to you. Look round upon Christendom. Look into the darkest, as well as into what are called the brightest, corners of it. See idolatry here; pride and exclusiveness there. See men disputing, reviling, slandering, on all sides of you, about the faith that has been delivered to them. See, while these things are going on among those who boast that they have the doctrine which can renew the world, what utter heathenism, brutality, atheism, is reigning among the masses who are sealed with the seal of God's covenant. Do not trust to your own observation of these facts. Take with you the most scoffing infidel you can find to show them to you, to force them upon your notice, to draw his natural inferences from them. Let him point out to you the different plans of comprehension and reconciliation which wise and religious men have devised, and tell you, with infinite ridicule, how they have all come to naught. Let him show you how in fact each of these plans of compromise is really a confederacy among certain sections of the Church, for the destruction of some other. Acknowledge the truth of his boast that each school and church is glad of help from statesmen whom they all denounce as oppressors, yes, from the most absolute, godless tyrannies, to accomplish their own ends. Nay, stop not yet. Go into some smaller circle of persons separating themselves from others and making the establishment of peace and unity among men their watchwords. Mark the jealousies, strifes, heart-burnings, among them. O, yet once more! See them in your own heart; those lusts that war in your members, — *they* cause all the wars and tumults without.

And then ask yourselves, whether you can meditate on such a world as this, whether you can explain how society has been possible in it, how families, nations, churches, can have existed in it, how there has been order and fellowship amidst so much hatred and anarchy, — unless there were a centre of unity, a divine source of life and regeneration, such as Isaiah confessed when he cried, "Unto us a Son is given, and the government is on His shoulder, and His name is Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." I know that there is a conscience and reason within us which say, "Such a One there *must be*." And oh! are we to refuse to believe, because the Bible has said it, because the creeds of Christendom have said it, because myriads of suffering men and women in all corners of the earth have said it, "Such a One *there is*"? Do you desire some new king or prophet to arise and tell you a truth which you never heard before? Kings and prophets we shall have, if we need them; but they can only repeat the old lesson; they can only say, "He is come, and unto Him the gathering of the people shall be." They can but do what each one of us in his own place and vocation may do now; — proclaim that the great Christian Passover is prepared; that men of all habits, opinions, races, are invited to sit down at it; that the poor, the halt, the blind, will be welcomed by Him who lived with them and died for them; that upon them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death a Light has risen which no powers in earth or hell can quench.

SERMON XVI.

THE PROUD CITY DOOMED.

LINCOLN'S INN, 5TH SUNDAY IN LENT. — MARCH 29, 1852.

The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah, the son of Amoz, did see. — ISAIAH xiii. 1.

IN the seventeenth chapter of the Second Book of Kings, we find these words. "In the twelfth year of Ahaz, king of Judah, began Hoshea, the son of Elah, to reign in Samaria over Israel nine years. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; but not as the kings of Israel which were before him. Against him came up Shalmaneser, king of Assyria; and Hoshea became his servant and gave him presents. And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea. For he had sent messengers to So, king of Egypt, and brought no present to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." Then follows a long enumeration of the sins which had brought this divine visitation upon the ten tribes, ending with the words, "So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day."

When we speak of two great captivities, we allude to the one which is spoken of here, and to the one which took place after Nebuchadnezzar had plundered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. But no one can read the history attentively without perceiving indications of a series of captivities. I alluded, in a former lecture, to those of which Joel speaks, captivities that had already taken place in his time, not into Assyria, but into the Isles of Greece, in Phœnician ships. These, as I remarked, are to be separated from all that follow. Joel looks forward to a great judgment upon the Tyrians and Sidonians, who had been concerned in them, — a judgment to be brought about by the agency of some power, which was not discernible by his eyes. When kings of Assyria appeared in the land, it became clear to every divinely instructed observer, how the prediction of Joel, as well as that with which the book of Amos opens, would be verified. This prophet said that the three and four sins of Tyre and Damascus, of Moab and Samaria, were bringing on their appointed punishment. He saw also in what manner this punishment would be executed. There might be a temporary imposition of tribute, which the kings of the nations would pay as long as they were under the fear of an immediate invasion, which they would withhold whenever they had confidence in their own strength, or were encouraged by the promises of any powerful neighbor. But ultimately the rule of ancient oriental conquest would be enforced; the people would be carried away in smaller or greater portions into the land of the victors, and be reduced to slavery there. Accordingly, I read to you, three Sundays ago, in the 2 Kings xv. 29, an account of a captivity in the days of Pekah, king of Israel, one which we are told affected Gilead and Galilee, and all the land of Naphtali. The more complete captivity of Damascus, which took place at the same time, is recorded in the ninth verse of the sixteenth chapter. The one under Shalmaneser was, therefore, merely the pursuance of a policy which had been already commenced. There was an interval during which the Israelites could still reckon themselves a nation, though a tributary one; but the sentence was hanging over them; it might be completely executed at any time.

This succession of events gives great force and reality to those often repeated words of Isaiah, "For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still." The captivity under Tiglath Pileser may have easily seemed to the people of Israel the fulfilment of all the threatenings which their prophets had pronounced against them. With their view of the character of God, they would naturally think the loss of a few cities and a portion of their people a sufficient satisfaction of His wrath for their transgressions. Looking at moral evil, not as destructive in itself, as that which makes men's lives wretched, and the earth barren, they inquired, not what methods he would take to deliver men and the earth from it, but what amount of physical evil He might inflict as a compensation for the injuries which He had received. They did not, therefore, turn to Him that smote them. There was no earnest reformation. They sought help from Egypt; they talked of replacing buildings of brick with buildings of stone, houses of sycamore with houses of cedar. The prophet had need to tell them that the punishment was not over, since the work for which it was sent was not accomplished. A righteous Being seeks to set righteousness on the earth. If men will hear His voice and submit to be made righteous, He has no pleasure in destroying them. But by all means the earth must be purged of its tormentors; the proud, the careless, the oppressors, must be made to humble themselves, to understand that life is not a play, to know that their words and their deeds are not their own, that men are not their property, that they cannot do what they like. Therefore, if Tiglath Pileser went home and came no more, another would come instead of him. When Shalmaneser had done all that he had to do with Samaria, there would still be a Sennacherib to invade Judah. Nay, if their race failed, there would be another race. If the scourge was no longer in the hands of the king of Assyria, it would be transferred to other hands not less terrible.

Would this scourge destroy the life of the Jewish nation? This was the awful question which presented itself to the minds of the prophets when they saw one and another limb of this nation lopped off, when they foresaw that a great numerical majority of the tribes would be carried away. We have heard how Isaiah was enabled to face this question. His eyes were opened to see whence the permanence of the race was derived, how great critical moments of its life discovered Him who was everlastingly present with it. The child born in hours of trouble and rebuke had borne witness to him of the continuance of the regal family, as well as of the people of God's covenant, when the rage of their enemies, as well as their own faithlessness, was threatening them with certain destruction. Nor was this all. In the miserable, heartless reign of Ahaz, the vision had been presented to him of a "Rod coming out of the stem of Jesse, which should stand for an ensign of the people. To it should the Gentiles seek; and his rest should be glorious." The immediate fruits which Isaiah saw coming out of this root, might have appeared in the days of any patriotic and prosperous prince, and did actually appear in the latter days of Hezekiah. No doubt at that time "a remnant of the people which were left" were drawn back by the summons of the king, and by his influence with the surrounding kings, "from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the Islands of the Sea." Such words do not necessarily indicate more than the recovery of a multitude of Jewish slaves out of the bondage into which they had been brought by the neighboring people; Assyria, which had, in the mean time, been weakened by internal revolutions, being just as likely to give up a portion of her booty as any of those whom she had herself crushed and made feeble. No doubt Hezekiah might become, and did actually become, "an ensign to the nations," just as Solomon had been before him, one to whom they brought presents, whose alliance they sought, whose elevation out of a deep calamity was a proof that some mighty God was with him. No doubt "Ephraim did not in those days envy Judah, or Judah vex Ephraim," as they had done before through so many ages. There was a feeling of a benignant native ruler, who cared for all the people of God alike. He must have been the one powerful king who was left in that whole region; so that "the Philistines and Edom and Moab and the children of Ammon" would naturally "obey him." Egypt would be no more a dangerous neighbor to such a prince; it would respect him as it had done his great predecessor; men might "go dry-shod" over the river which had once been beset by hostile armaments. And though there might be still multitudes of Jews left in the cities of Assyria, there would be "a highway open to them," a preparation for them to come back into their land, if their own unwillingness, or the death of the king and the reign of some evil successor, did not hinder it.

But though we need not seek in any more distant days than those of Hezekiah, for a very satisfactory fulfilment of these predictions (and let it never be forgotten that what may seem to us, when we look back over three thousand years, an exaggerated description of deliverance and restoration, must have seemed inadequate and almost cold to those who experienced the blessing), — though Hezekiah was a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and though the spirit of the Lord did rest upon him, "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord, though he did judge the poor with righteousness, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth," — though the peacefulness and order of his last years might faithfully carry out the symbols of the wolf and the lamb lying down together, — yet it was no less impossible for the prophet to think chiefly of Hezekiah when he was uttering these words, than it would have been for him to fancy that he was the King whom he saw sitting on the throne, and his train filling the temple, in the year that Uzziah died. The more he saw of what corresponded to this description in the actual monarch, the more would his thoughts be drawn to the One in whose name and in whose might he was reigning, to Him from whom the Spirit came by which he was quickened. Hezekiah he could but look upon as exhibiting some few rays of His splendor, the feeble image of His righteous government. The Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, upon whom that government rested, was the upholder of the Jewish people. Apart from Him, it was merely the miserable heap of fragments which we so often suppose must be carried away before the Assyrian whirlwind.

There was, however, this great blessing which came to Isaiah from his being able to connect the Divine King with an actual man. The belief that a Man must embody and present the Godhead, that only in a man could its blessedness and glory appear, — that belief which we saw slowly developing itself in the prophet's mind, — acquired a force and vividness from his hope of Hezekiah's government and from his actual experience of it, which we may say, without rashness or profaneness, would have been otherwise wanting in him. In using that language, I am only affirming that any method but the one which we know the Divine Wisdom has adopted for conveying a truth to a man's spirit must be an imperfect method. Hezekiah's existence was necessary to the instruction of Isaiah, and through him of all generations to come. Perhaps we may find that Shalmaneser and Sennacherib were scarcely less necessary.

Apparently the prophet passes in our chapter to an entirely new subject. The Assyrian, of whom he had spoken so much before, and of whom he speaks so often again, seems to be forgotten. He opens with the burden of Babylon. He goes on to the burden of Damascus, the burden of Moab, the burden of Egypt, the burden of the Valley of Vision, the burden of Tyre. The occurrence of the word "Babylon" led commentators of the last age to conclude that he must mean to foretell the downfall of that kingdom, which took place in the reign of Belshazzar. Some of the bolder critics of our own time, finding great difficulties in an interpretation which breaks the harmony of the prophet's visions and destroys their application to the people among whom he was dwelling, and whom he was sent to warn, have decreed that all these passages, together with all the chapters after the fortieth, must have been written subsequently to the Chaldean captivity, probably in the age of Ezra, and that they have been mixed with the genuine discourses of Isaiah by a compiler. I do not wonder that this theory should have startled and shocked readers who have been wont to regard the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters (to say nothing of the fortieth and the fifty-third) as containing the very inmost spirit of the Esaian prophecies. Still, the mere sentimental feeling which attaches a particular passage to a particular name will be readily sacrificed by a lover of truth. The more firmly we believe the Bible to be from God, the less serious will that sacrifice seem to us. We shall hear God's voice speaking to us, by whatever appellation we denote him who is the instrument of the communication. It is, however, a grave question, whether we ought to abandon a venerable tradition, which has connected itself with the feelings of Jews and Christians for generations, not because there is any decisive external proof that it is untenable, but merely in order to escape from a difficulty which perhaps we have created for ourselves. That it is a difficulty, I at once acknowledge. Not only the coherency of the prophet's discourse is lost, if we feel that we are reading in one paragraph of an event soon to occur, and in the next of one which would not happen for two hundred years, and which has no internal connection with it, — not only are we unable to understand how such a prophecy could contain any lesson for the contemporaries of Isaiah, — but we are forced to outrage the letter and to misrepresent the character of the very discourses which we seek to preserve. I am persuaded that it is impossible for any one to read attentively the brilliant description of a conqueror, or destroyer of boundaries, in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah, and to think of it as applying to such a mere voluptuary as Belshazzar is represented to be in the Book of Daniel. The description is doubtless more applicable to Nebuchadnezzar; yet Jeremiah never speaks of him without some respectful epithet (such as "the servant of the Lord"), and his government, as the prophet of the captivity represents it, stands out in advantageous contrast to that of all his predecessors and followers. Moreover, there was no destruction of Babylon in his day; it was the time of its highest glory. On the other hand, there is the very closest resemblance between the picture of a Babylonian monarch which is drawn in this chapter, and the language respecting the Assyrian which was used in the tenth, and with that which is applied directly to Sennacherib in the thirty-eighth. These remarks may lead us to inquire whether it may not be a safer course to reconsider our own theories of the divine book before we unsettle its order that we may make it accord with them. Babylon, it is admitted, was a powerful city, dependent at this time on the Assyrian Empire. It may have been regarded as the sacred city of the Empire, even while Nineveh or any other place was the capital of it; just in the same way as the glory of Mecca was not diminished in Mahometan eyes by the residence of the Caliphs in Bagdad, and has scarcely suffered from the reputation of any later metropolis of the Sultans. There is something in Isaiah's language which would favor such an hypothesis as this, for he speaks of Babylon as especially the seat of the graven images of the gods, of the gods falling when the city falls. But without resorting to any conjecture, we know positively what image the name Babylon must have called up to a Jewish seer who meditated on the divine word by day and night. Long before he had the least reason to connect that particular city with the punishment of the Jewish tribes, long after its importance had disappeared, and it had given place to capitals which were mud villages or fishermen's huts when chariots were passing over its walls, the name still continued in permanent association with the experiment of building a tower whose top should reach to heaven, that the sons of Noah might not be scattered abroad upon the earth, as God had purposed that they should, according to their tribes, in their families, in their nations; and in association also with the dynasty which was set up by Nimrod the great hunter before the Lord. In other words, Babel or Babylon represented to the prophets the attempt to establish a universal society, without respect to tribes, nations, families, not upon the acknowledgment of divine care and protection, but upon the acknowledgment of a mere power in nature against which men must try to measure their own. It pointed to the actual establishment of such a power, not on a scale commensurate with the original design, but on the same principle, the great hunter or tyrant confessing no landmarks, owning no responsibilities, believing that the earth was intended for his possession, that the gods were sovereigns raised above all law and obligation, that the human sovereigns were most like them when they could most cast such fetters aside. In lecturing on the Old Testament, I have been obliged again and again to remind you of the existence of such a power, of its first appearance in the world, of the way in which the order and history of the Jewish nation were made, from age to age, silently to testify against it. What I wish you to observe now is, that the critical moment had arrived, when the testimony could not any longer be a silent one. The prophets could not in the least have understood what was about to happen in their land, the length and breadth of the conflict in which it was to engage,—they would have been completely crushed at once by the confused aspects of it and by the almost inevitable issue of it,—if they had not been led into a much deeper apprehension than their fathers ever possessed, of the position which they occupied, of the work which they had to do, of their influence upon all the after destinies of mankind. And for this end it was quite necessary that they should have a *name* by which to denote the power which was coming against them, a name significant of its continuous nature, a name which should have associations with the present as well as with the past, a name suggesting features which they should have to look upon with their own eyes, and the description of which might be an heir-loom to their descendants, enabling them to trace the same in a succession of men or of dynasties.

Isaiah's prediction, I think, exactly fulfils these conditions. "Babylon is the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency. But her time is near to come, her days shall not be prolonged. The Medes have been stirred up against her; their bows shall dash the young men to pieces, they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb, their eye shall not spare children." That this is the description of an event about to befall the actual Babylon,—then a leading city of the Assyrian Empire,—I cannot doubt. The Medes would be the tribe to make such an invasion. They were notoriously the power which threatened Assyria at this time, which robbed it of some of its provinces, which finally overthrew it. They are described as a mountain tribe, careless of silver and gold, very unlike what they were in the days of Cyrus. I apprehend that the attack made upon Babylon while Sennacherib was invading Syria, Ethiopia, and Egypt, may have been as fierce as Isaiah represents this, — destructive of temples and gods, — ominous of one which would be like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. The words, "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation, neither shall the Arabian pitch his tent there, neither shall the shepherds make their fold there; but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures, and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there," — *may* refer to the desolation which Assyrian and Chaldean travellers witness in our day. They cannot have the least application to the state of things under the Medo-Persic rule; for during that Babylon continued to be a conspicuous city, a summer residence for the kings.

But they must refer to more than the destruction of a certain Chaldean city then or afterwards. How can we limit them to it, when I find such words as these? "I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. I will make a man more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir. Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts and in the day of his fierce anger." I want to know why the first Babylon fell, and why the last Babylon fell; I want to know what makes any city deserve the name of a city of confusion; I want to know why a city that does deserve that title may yet be suffered to lay waste the earth, and lead nations into captivity. Isaiah answers all these questions together. A man in the old Babylon, a man in every later Babylon, was not accounted more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir. It was the principle of the society that he should be accounted *less* precious; for the sake of the outward splendor and glory the human being was sacrificed; the *person* was given up for the *thing*. Here is the one adequate, satisfactory exposition of the cause of the fall of empires. Hence we understand how great empires have become the scourge of small nations. When they have adopted the Babylonian principle into their hearts, when it has penetrated and pervaded their acts and their lives, when it has overturned or made contradictory all the deeper and truer principles which are embodied in their constitutions, — then those huge tyrannies, which realize the inhuman godless maxim most perfectly, which recognize no law but that, are commissioned to sweep and devastate, that the tribes which have adopted their lie, and mimicked their crimes, may feel in themselves the full pressure of both. And this, that all may understand how impossible it is to build human society upon another ground than that upon which God has built it, how certainly the most splendid city that was ever raised in the earth will fall down, and all its palaces perish, if it is merely formed of bricks and slime, which men have substituted for the living stones which God has hewn out and fitted together.

All the chapters in Isaiah which follow, till that one in which he says, "Behold the Lord maketh the earth empty and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down and scattereth the inhabitants thereof," are setting forth one aspect or another of that great judgment by which it was proved that a man is more precious than the golden wedge of Ophir; a judgment in which Samaria and Judah suffered with Moab and Tyre, because they are sharers in the same sin. But the fall of Babylon is a blow to the Asiatic empire, which declares how little it has cause to exult in the ruin it is producing, how certainly that ruin will return upon itself, because it springs from evils which are lying more deeply and radically within it, than within any of the people whom God hath sent it forth to punish. Instead of being an interpolated fragment in the midst of Isaiah's discourses, the burden of Babylon comes in to make all the visitations upon the other tribes of the earth intelligible, and to relieve our minds of the infinite oppression which we should otherwise have in contemplating them. They are diverse, but harmonious, portions of the same divine message to men, — a message of terror, but also of deliverance and hope. In the fourteenth chapter we feel how wonderfully these are combined. The hearts of the people in all ages have been stirred by these words: "In the day when the Lord shall give thee rest from thy sorrow, and from thy fear, and from the hard bondage wherein thou wast made to serve, thou shalt take up this proverb against the king of Babylon, and say, How hath the oppressor ceased! the golden city ceased! The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers. He who smote the people in wrath with a continual stroke, he that ruled the nations in anger, is persecuted, and none hindereth. The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet; they break forth into singing. Yea, the fir-trees rejoice at thee, and the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since thou art laid down, no feller is come up against us. Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak, and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us? Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee. How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house: but thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcass trodden under feet. Thou shalt not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evil-doers shall never be renowned. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities. For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of Hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water: and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts."

But though most feel something of the grandeur of this poetry, and a few the truth of this prophecy, we do not enough consider upon what both are founded. We have heard how the God-Man was the ground upon which the Jewish nation stood, that which it was in due time to make known to all nations as the ground upon which they must stand. Here you have the contrast, the Man-God, he who would ascend up to heaven and exalt his throne above the stars of God. This is the natural ruler of a society which counts the gold of Ophir more precious than human beings. For in some way or other, man must have his glory; it may be as a tyrant trampling upon his fellows, as if they were mere things created for his use; it may be as one bearing the image of God and claiming his brethren as intended to bear that image. He who would be a Lucifer, a son of the morning, must seek to be a god by rising above men and degrading men. He who is the Son of God, one with the Father, must prove that He has that glory by humbling Himself and becoming of no reputation, by taking upon Him the form of a servant. The one wants to be above all law, that he may assert his own will, and subject all wills to his; the other makes Himself subject to law, that He may show forth His Father's will and give up His own, and redeem men from slavery into the service which is freedom. The one saith, " By the strength of my hand have I done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. And I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a mighty man. And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people, and as one that gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth. And there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped." The other prays for His poor family upon earth, " that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they all may be one in us."

Yes, brethren, we have here the Babylonian power and the Jerusalem power, that parody of human and divine greatness which is seen in an earthly tyrant, that perfect reconciliation of divinity and humanity which is seen in the Redeemer. Consider both images well. Both are presented to us; we must admire and copy one of them. And whichever we take, we must resolutely discard the other. If we have ever mixed them together in our minds, a time is at hand that will separate them for ever. One was marked on your foreheads in childhood when you were signed with the sign of the cross, and the prayer was prayed for you, that you might not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified against sin, the world, and the Devil. The other, the Babylonian mark and image, your own evil nature, a corrupt society, the evil spirit, have been stirring to stamp you with ever since. Each hour you are tempted to think a man less precious than the gold of Ophir. The current maxims of the world take for granted that he is; you in a thousand ways are acting on those maxims. O, remember that in them, and in the habits which they beget, lies the certain presage of slavery for men and nations, the foretaste of decay and ruin, which no human contrivances can avert, which the gifts and blessings of God's providence only accelerate. And think this also. When once this disease has penetrated into the vitals of a people, it may be very decorous and very religious; but it cannot believe in the Son of Man. "How sayest thou that the Son of Man must be lifted up?" asked the religious, gold-worshipping Jew of our Lord; "Who is this Son of Man?" He had answered that question by stooping to the lowest state of men, by living with fishermen, by eating and drinking with publicans and sinners. But this answer only confounded them the more. "Such a one cannot be Christ the King," they said. And so when Pilate brought forth Jesus crowned with thorns, and said, "Behold the Man, behold the King," and "Shall I crucify your King?" the high-priests, those who spoke the voice of the people, those who represented their belief, cried out, "We have no king but Cæsar." A Man-God is our choice, the God-Man shall not reign over us.

Brethren, may God in His mercy grant that our English faith may never express itself in the same way, or give birth to acts differing only in form, not in essence, from that which the Jewish nation perpetrated. May God grant us power to cast Babylonian principles out of our hearts, that when they come before us embodied in some person, sustained by some mighty physical force, we may despise them and laugh them to scorn, knowing that not against us, but against the Holy One, our enemy is exalting himself and lifting up his voice on high. God grant that in that day we may be able to sing the song which the prophet said should be sung in the land of Judah. "We have a strong city. Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

NOTE.

"In the time of Sanherib (Sennacherib)," says Niebuhr, "Babylon acknowledged the supremacy of

Assyria, and had, perhaps, even been compelled to submit to Shalmanassar. Hagisah, a brother of Sanherib, was king of Babylon, but that kingdom revolted and Hagisah was slain. Merodach Baladan then raised himself to the throne." — *Lectures on Ancient History*, Vol. I. pp. 31, 32.

SERMON XVII.

THE SUFFERING KING AND PEOPLE.

Lincoln's Inn, Palm Sunday. — April 4, 1852.

> Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my spirit upon him; he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. — Isaiah xlii. 1 – 3.

The burden of Babylon, of which I spoke last Sunday, is said to have been in the year that Ahaz died. In that year Isaiah warned the whole of Palestine that it must not rejoice because the rod of him that smote it was broken; for out of the serpent's root should come forth a cockatrice, and his fruit should be a fiery flying serpent. Yet he tells his countrymen that the poor shall feed and the needy shall lie down in safety. The Lord hath founded Zion; the poor of his people shall trust in it.

I said that Isaiah evidently expected that this new calamity would *soon* overtake the land. He tells Moab that in "*three years* its glory shall be contemned with all its great multitudes." He goes barefoot *three years*, as a sign to the Egyptians and Ethiopians that the young and old should be led captives by the Assyrians. He says that Kedar shall be wasted within a year.

The desolation will be a very sweeping one. The prophet looks to see the whole earth turned upside down, the land emptied, the master and the servant perishing, money-lenders and money-borrowers, all classes of men, cast into utter ruin.

There were two great invasions of Palestine in the reign of Hezekiah; that which took place under Shalmaneser in his fourth year, that of Sennacherib in his fourteenth. I apprehend that most of the calamities which are spoken of in the twenty-fourth chapter were fully realized in the former.

I have spoken already of the hopes which dawned upon the prophet's mind in the midst of its gloom, of his assurance that the time of discomforture and overthrow to all surrounding nations, of terror to his own, would nevertheless be in some respects a better and more blessed time than most which had preceded it. The confidence grows brighter and firmer as the cloud becomes nearer and more portentous. The prophet does not merely trust that light will follow when the darkness is scattered. He sees the light present in the midst of the darkness. The depth of the night makes him know that there is a dayspring from on high which will visit his land and all lands. It is difficult to say whether the song of trust and thanksgiving in the twenty-fifth chapter is one of anticipation, or whether it was uttered in sight of a ruin which had already more than fulfilled all his saddest forebodings. The visions of a prophet, concerning that which is to be, are so full of present force and reality, his contemplation of that which has happened is so necessarily involved with foresight of its issues, that nothing is harder, as all interpreters have felt, than to fix the boundaries between the two. If we could do it accurately and decisively, much of the very meaning of prophecy would be lost; it would be far less a guide to us in our own meditations upon the world we read of, the world we behold, and the world that shall be, than (if we use it rightly) it is now. And music or song seems so especially ordained to give a sense of wholeness and unity to those thoughts which ordinary discourse breaks up into successive instants, that when the prophet pours forth a lyrical rapture, we should try more than at other times to follow the movements of his spirit, in the certainty that they cannot be defined by chronological landmarks. Nevertheless, it is the impression, I think, upon the minds of most readers, and, I cannot doubt, a right impression, that this chapter, if it is in a measure prospective, yet must have been written during the Assyrian invasion. I do not rest any thing upon tenses. Every reader of the prophets must feel how ambiguous they are. But still the words, " Thou hast made of a city an heap, of a defenced city a ruin, a palace of strangers to be no city," and these, " Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall," do seem to describe an actual experience. One can hardly help thinking that the man who wrote such words had just heard of some old and famous Palestine city which had been sacked, if he was not walking amidst the ruins of it; and that he was at the same time drinking in consolation from the thought that the cry of a number of serfs and bondsmen, which had gone up to Heaven against the oppressors in their own country, was answered by this visitation. It was not merely that their wrongs were thus avenged. The humbling of the proud men of their own cities may have been an actual immediate blessing to them. The rich men and rulers of neighboring lands may have been awakened by the common danger to a sense of sympathy and brotherhood which they had never known before. At all events, an eternal law was revealed to the prophet's mind,—and in greater or less clearness to the minds of others who witnessed the same events,—a law which decreed that mere force should not prevail, that the strong should be laid low, that the weak should be raised up; a law which contained a sure pledge that some day or other "God would destroy the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that was spread over all nations, that He would swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from all faces."

We have all of us witnessed enough of remarkable changes and sudden revolutions, to be capable of understanding passages in the prophet's discourse which at first sound puzzling and contradictory. "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." "Let favor be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness." "In the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and not behold the majesty of the Lord." "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see. But they shall see." It is thus that two opposing sides of truth present themselves to a divinely taught man. There is a blindness, an insensibility, a lightness of heart, which at one moment strikes him as quite inconceivable in those who are passing through fires which will leave effects behind them for generations to come. Then he perceives that, after all, the visitation has not been in vain, that men have seen and felt a meaning in it, even when they have been trying to harden themselves, nay, when they have even plunged into worse courses than those which it was sent to warn them of; they have confessed that a divine hand has been lifted up, though they have invented a number of dry and empty formulas to persuade themselves that what has happened has no reference to their evil doings; their consciences have been awakened, though the awakening out of such a sleep and such fever-dreams as theirs is to terror, not to repentance. But meantime there has been the peaceable fruit of righteousness slowly, not suddenly or immaturely, coming forth in those who desired to know more of God and His ways, who dimly, amidst many contradictions of thought and practice, yet confessed a law of right, and tried to follow it. "O Lord our God," such persons will cry out, "other gods beside Thee have had dominion over us: but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy Name. They are dead; they shall not live. Therefore Thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."

To understand when a national reformation has taken place, when even there has been any solid commencement of it, is the hardest of all things. A prophet shows his wisdom to be above that of other men, not by pronouncing upon the diagnostics of such a change, but by marking all the various, fluctuating symptoms which ever and anon tempt him to doubt the reality of it, and then show that it is in process; still more, by connecting these symptoms with others which he discovers in himself, with his own strange vicissitudes and inconsistencies, with the deep conviction which he has at one time of God's truth and love, and his thankfulness that they should in any wise make themselves manifest, and then with the utter dreariness, barrenness, heartlessness, of his inner soul, and of his outward acts. "From the uttermost parts of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! The treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously." He understands the treachery of other men's dealings with God's promises and His covenant, by the treachery of his own. And so — wonderful and gracious result of such baffling and bewildering experiences — he is thrown back upon those promises and that covenant, or rather upon God Himself, the Author of them. He discovers a ground deeper than human faithfulness; the faithfulness and righteousness of God. And that is sufficient to sustain his hopes, not for himself, not for a few men in whose truth he can confide better than in his own, but for his nation, with all its sins and idolatries, for the universe which God has created and not forsaken.

I apprehend that Isaiah had need of all these lessons so hardly learnt, not merely that he might be able to judge of the state of his nation while it was undergoing this visitation, or had just escaped from it, but that he might think rightly and speak wisely in the ten more peaceful years which followed. To these years I think we may refer most of the discourses which are contained between the twenty-seventh and thirty-sixth chapters of this book.

We do not need a prophet to tell us how very soon the mere impression of any great calamity passes away from the majority of a people, when the visible signs of it are not present. It becomes a topic for men to talk of. Some may smart under the recollection of lands devastated, or friends perished; but soon all seems to have returned to its old course. In many there is a strange sense of security from the notion that they have had their fill of startling occurrences, and that any repetition of them can scarcely be looked for in their day. The people of Jerusalem had more than ordinary excuse for this confidence. Their city had escaped the general wreck. A feeling strangely mixed of faith and fatalism might lead them to think that it would be eternal. Moreover, that great blessing which Isaiah had looked forward to, and which connected itself with all his deepest intuitions respecting a Divine Ruler, the blessing of a King reigning in righteousness, had been granted to the land. Hezekiah probably began to remove some of the abuses which his father introduced, before Shalmaneser's invasion. He must assuredly have been one of those who received precious instruction from that judgment. It found him with an open, prepared heart; it must have changed him rapidly from a promising youth into a sobered and saddened man. It had given him, too, facilities which he had not possessed before. The portion of the ten tribes which remained would be glad of his protection, might welcome his invitations to come up to Jerusalem and worship. The surrounding people would respect the king who had survived when theirs had fallen. These effects, at which I hinted in my last sermon, must have been more remarkable in a later part of his reign; but there will have been enough of them, even at this time, to elate the inhabitants of Judea with a sense of their own power and superiority. The feeling would be all the stronger because it was a rebound from a state of depression and shame. With it, and with the returning prosperity of the land, would come fresh wantonness and self-indulgence, the old oppression of the poor, of the debtors, of the slaves; the old sottishness. To these evils would be added that one upon which Isaiah dwelt so much in the introduction to his book, the multitude of sacrifices; unrighteous dealings, indifference to human beings, being glossed over with the show and phantom of religion. There would be politicians, too, in this society. Some who were confident in the friendship of the Assyrian, and thought he could never return to their land; some who believed that, with the help of the Pharaohs, no evil could overtake them; some who fancied that they might form a native force strong enough to drive off any invader.

To all these different tendencies of the people's mind Isaiah addresses himself in this grand series of discourses. The drunkards of Ephraim, the scorners, the sleeping prophets and priests and rulers of Jerusalem, the rebellious children who would strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh and trust in the shadow of Egypt, the men who stay on horses and trust in chariots because they are many,—all pass before his eyes, all receive his awful rebuke. There will be a tempest of hail, a new destroying storm in the fat valleys which are bringing forth the wine. An overflowing scourge will pass through the land. Morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night. Those who are mocking at the coming danger will find it a vexation only to hear the report. There will be heaviness and sorrow in Ariel, the city of David; there will be a camp round about it, forts will be raised against it. It shall be brought down and speak out of the ground; its speech shall be low out of the dust, as of one that hath a familiar spirit. The Egyptians will be ashamed of a people that could not profit them nor be a help to them, but only a reproach. If they did help, they would help in vain. The Egyptians are men, and not God; horses are flesh, and not spirit. "When the Lord shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they both shall fail together."

Hezekiah seems to have had two sets of advisers, one represented by Shebna the Scribe, one by Eliakim, who was over the house. The former Isaiah denounces as utterly base and selfish; the other, it is said, shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The king, it would seem, must at this time have yielded to the meaner and more cowardly policy. He might be just in his ordinary dealings, a refuge for the poor, a destroyer of idols, and yet not have thought or understood that flesh is weaker than spirit; the horses of Egypt than the word of God. No doubt he thought he trusted God. He had given some proofs that he did trust Him. But perhaps he had begun to trust his own faith, to glorify that;—not Him who had been the object of it. A man soon finds what a reed that is to lean upon; and then he naturally looks for other reeds to help out its weakness. In a moment of vain self-confidence Hezekiah seems to have refused tribute to the kings of Assyria. We have a right to give the act that name, and to suppose that he was prompted to it by his Egyptian advisers, for the first appearance of the enemy daunted him and led him (so the Second Book of Kings tells us) to make the most abject submission.

The prophet, joyfully as he had hailed the reign of the new king, much as he honored him, does not point to him as any ground of confidence to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, in the hour of trial which he said was approaching. That other King, who had been the first inspirer of his words, who had been more and more clearly manifesting Himself to him in all that he had seen or foreseen since, was the one support of his hopes. "Behold," he says to the rulers in Jerusalem, "I lay in Zion a foundation-stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, and he that believeth shall not make haste." To know the actual living centre of the nation was, we have seen, the great gift which the prophet had derived from the teaching he had received hitherto; all new trials and disappointments were to bring this centre more clearly before him; he could not but contemplate this as the great end and interpretation of them to the whole people. The certainty of this truth does not permit him to make haste. In the days of Ahaz he had been taught to despise the plots of Samaria and Syria and Judah against each other; these had come to naught. The devices of the feeble men about Hezekiah, who could not look beyond the moment, who could only invent expedients, seemed to him as contemptible; still more shameful the ignorance of the prophets and priests, who should have taught the eternal principles which the book of their country's history proclaimed, but who pretended they could not read it because it was sealed. God, however, was bringing these principles into light. A day was at hand which would enable the deaf to hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind to see out of obscurity. A revelation there would be of the Divine purpose in maintaining the chosen race from age to age; a proof that the promises to Abraham were not empty promises; signs that the visible priests, prophets, kings, had all their appointed functions, had all been bearing their mighty testimony that there was a Priest, Prophet, King, of whom they were only the emblems and spokesmen. The prophet's words, therefore, are as full of encouragement as they are of warning and terror; — not of encouragement contingent upon certain acts or lines of conduct which their country might pursue; — of encouragement as absolute as any fatalist could derive from the conviction that Jerusalem had a charmed life, which no ill-doings or negligence could destroy. Only there was this amazing difference. The pledges of the nation's endurance were also pledges that every form of evil should be put down; that truth and righteousness should stand. Its existence meant that, nothing but that. It was the appointed proclaimer to all nations of a law of right and truth to which they were subject, of a God of right and truth who was their God, of a Divine Image of that God who would confound the images which they had made of Him. Through this part of Isaiah's prophecy, through all the visions of deep, unutterable weakness and shame which were to come upon his land, through all the visions of glory behind and beneath that weakness and shame, the same truth is working itself out into clearness. Jerusalem must live because it has a message to deliver, a message of blessedness and freedom to all the tribes of its own land. Israel must live because it has a message of blessedness and power to all the people of the earth. Let it sink as low as it may; in the depth of humiliation it will be a prophet to the universe; nay, it can be a true prophet to the universe only when all its imaginary, false strength is taken from it, and when it is able in utter nothingness to realize the Divine help which is within it.

Such were Isaiah's preparations for the event which took his master and people by surprise, and set their hearts to meditate terror, each one saying, "Where is the Scribe? where is the receiver? where is he that counted the towers?" In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, we are told, "Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came up against all the fenced cities of Judah and took them. And he sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem with a great army; and he stood by the conduit of the upper pool." He sent a message of scorn to the king; of scorn which must have been felt, not only because there was an army to enforce it, but for the deep truth which lay in it. Sennacherib challenged Hezekiah to bring forth all his horses and he would put riders upon them. He bade him understand that Egypt was a broken reed, which would go into the hand of every one that leaned upon it. He said they might talk of trusting in the Lord, but he was not come up, without the Lord, against that city. He appealed to all the cities he had destroyed already, and the little help which their gods had given them. The words of the Assyrian were, as always happens in such cases, the words which the patriot prophet had uttered in vain; if the people had heeded them when they came from his lips, they would not have heard them from the oppressor's. It was only the prophet who could answer these words, and cheer the people who had regarded him as their enemy. Hezekiah, despairing of Egypt, had cast himself before the living God, and besought Him to show whether He was indeed like the gods which the Assyrians had cast into the fire. His heart had caught a new inspiration as he prayed. He said, "Save us, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, and let all the kingdoms of the earth know that thou art the Lord, even thou only." Then came the answer. Isaiah spake and said, "This is the word of the Lord concerning him. The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. Against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel."

In these words lies, I believe, the secret, not merely of that well-known history, but of all that follows in this book. When the city had been delivered from its enemies, and the brighter days to which the prophet looked forward were actually commencing, Hezekiah fell sick. He had to experience in his own person the prostration of strength and spirit which his people had felt before. The first prayer in his sickness shows that he was still clinging to what he had done and what he had been. " Consider how I have walked before thee with a perfect heart." Yet there was in him an undercurrent of real trust in God. His thanksgiving for his recovery shows how wonderfully his self-righteousness had been taken away, — how he had been brought to feel that in God only was the life of his spirit. The lesson was a precious, though not a complete one; at least it was not proof against a new temptation. After the defeat of Sennacherib, the city began speedily to recover its strength. Treasures poured into it once more. The king received them in the right spirit, as gifts of God, as tokens of his deliverance.

But the tendency to worship the gold of Ophir, to think of that as the strength of men and nations, lay near the heart of this king and people, as it is near the heart of us all. There came messengers from a far country to greet the king on his recovery. It was not unnatural they should come, for the far country was Babylon, which had broken loose from the Assyrian government, and was therefore likely to fraternize with one who had so successfully thrown off its yoke. Hezekiah showed them all his treasures. To him the name Assyria was one of fearful omen; Babylon meant nothing. It was otherwise with the prophet. He had been taught to look through the mere temporary representatives of a false principle to the principle itself. Babylonia he saw would be as terrible to the descendants of Hezekiah and the world as Assyria had been. Out of the serpent's root another cockatrice was springing. He told Hezekiah that the sons which he should beget should be taken to the palace of the king of Babylon. These words we shall hear were literally fulfilled to Manasseh the son of Hezekiah. The prophet therefore does not project himself at once into a distant future when he speaks of a Babylonian captivity. He speaks, no doubt, of a series of evils which might stretch over years or even centuries; of punishments that would befall the land; of deliverances that would be wrought for it. But I apprehend we have given a precision and definiteness to his words on this subject in the later chapters of his book, which, if carefully and patiently considered, they will not be found to bear. Divines, eager to catch at a proof of the fulfilment of prophecy, have insisted that the account of the taking of Babylon by Cyrus, which is given in Herodotus, should have its exact counterpart in Isaiah. Now I do not venture to say that the expression "two-leaved gates" may not have some reference to the construction of the city of Nitocris or Nebuchadnezzar, or that the drying of rivers may not mean the altering of the course of the Euphrates. But I should be very sorry to build an argument on any subject, trifling or important, upon the assumption of such correspondences. The use of the name Cyrus undoubtedly suggests the thought of the Persian king who has been the subject of so much Greek as well as Oriental romance. But if we were not familiar with his traditionary history (which is so differently represented by the two Greek authorities), I do not think we should at once have resolved that that particular Persian king, or perhaps any other, must be indicated by the prophet's language. The often-repeated story, that the words were shown to Cyrus, and that they determined him to allow the chosen people to go forth, is a mere legend resting on no evidence at all. And it is at least singular that Ezra in the first chapter of his book alludes distinctly to a prophecy of Jeremiah which was accomplished in Cyrus, but does not point out a passage apparently so much more definite and emphatic.

This last argument may be turned to a different use by those of whom I spoke last Sunday, who hold that all the chapters in Isaiah after the fortieth were written by another person and at another period of the history. They might say, (though I suspect this evidence would prove too much,) that the silence of Ezra was favorable to the notion that this part of the prophecy had not yet become one of the recognized Jewish oracles. The answer to them lies not in detached sentences or paragraphs, but in the whole tenor of these chapters. There is only one ambiguous and difficult passage to connect them with a period subsequent to the destruction of the temple, or even with any anticipation of such destruction; whereas every characteristic of Isaiah's mind and discipline which we have traced through the earlier chapters reappears in these, — only with such expansions and developments as we should naturally look for.

Babylon is still, as before, the great Babel, the city of confusion; that which is setting up idols in place of God; that which is the destined punisher of the Babel notions and habits that have infected the holy city; which is blindly, inhumanly, godlessly, executing a mighty commission; which carries its doom written on its greatest triumphs. Jerusalem is always the society which is called out to witness by its words, by its acts, by its sufferings, for the power of weakness, for the fact that a city does not stand by walls and fortresses, for the presence of an invisible King reigning throughout generations. But that special discovery which was made to the prophet, by the share which Judea had in the fall and rising of the other nations, by its extreme peril, by its unlooked-for rescue, that it was to be the herald of a deliverance for all kindreds and races, comes forth with quite a new power, as the prophet, looking through the vista of years, sees how it may be destined to still closer and more humiliating connection with the great empires of the world. The burst with which the fortieth chapter opens, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God," is not suggested merely by the past redemption of the city. That would be a very insufficient consolation, one which Esarhaddon or Merodach-Baladan might speedily set at naught. But it was grounded upon a voice which the prophet heard crying in the wilderness, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low," by the assurance that "all flesh was as grass, and the goodliness thereof as the flower of grass, that the grass withereth and the flower fadeth, but that the word of our God should stand for ever." It was grounded upon the assurance that Jerusalem had good tidings to bring, that she could lift up her voice and say to all the cities of Judah, "Behold your God"; that she could announce Him, not as a tyrant such as they had imagined Him to be, a counterpart in the sky of the Assyrian upon earth, but as a shepherd who gathers the lambs with his arm, and carries them in his bosom, and gently leads those that are with young.

Proclaiming this Gospel to the cities of Judah which had yielded to all the idolatries of the nations round about, she could challenge those nations to bring forth their likenesses of God, all the images which they had made after the notions of their own minds, after the works of their own hands, after the things in heaven or earth or under the earth. Let them show, one and all, what these gods had done for them, or could do for them; what help, or guidance, or power of foresight against coming evil lay in them; what capacity they had of working good or evil. As the prophet's vision becomes brighter and his divine confidence stronger, he invites all the islands to enter into this controversy, to meet the feeble Israelite, the mere worm of the earth, and see whether the God in whom he trusts is not indeed the God of the whole earth, He who has ordered the times and seasons, the fate of nations, the revolutions of history. At each step the grandeur of his people's mission in being able to make their own life, even their own sins, witnesses of a kingdom which stretches over every land, over Moabite, Edomite, Egyptian, Assyrian, becomes more evident to him. At each step he sees more how its weakness is the secret of its power.

Were the nations, then, wrong in thinking they required a likeness, a human likeness, of God? Were they merely to be thrown back upon the idea of an absolute Being separated from their sorrows and sympathies? Such a doctrine, however seemingly magnificent, would really have led them by another route to an Assyrian God, a God of mere power, not a Shepherd, not a Redeemer, not a Holy One. No, there must be an image. Isaiah has seen it and felt it all along. Now he is permitted to trace, one by one, each feature of that image, to see it rising up a living whole before his spirit. "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect in whom my soul delighteth. I have put my Spirit upon him. He shall bring forth judgment unto the Gentiles." Here is the beginning of a stream of prophecy which runs on gathering new strength and sweeping away countless obstacles before it. I will stop at one point in that stream, at the words which we shall be reading to-morrow. "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" The Jew asks whether this is not the description of a triumphant conqueror returning from the defeat of the Heathen. Unquestionably. The Church which appointed the service for Passion-week did not wish us to forget that all the symbols of the prophet pointed to such a Person. Only she would have us remember that He is the same person whose visage is said to be marred more than any man's; who is declared to be the despised and rejected of men, — a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. She asks us to understand that out of that contempt, sorrow, and humiliation, all might comes; that the nations could never be subdued except by one who wrestled with the death and sin which all nations share together. The Jew asks, again, whether the man of sorrows may not be Isaiah or Hezekiah, the deserted prophet, the humbled king; whether he may not exhibit the condition of the Jewish race? Unquestionably. Isaiah was a man of sorrows; throughout the most blessed periods of Hezekiah's life he was a man of sorrows. The Jewish race is represented throughout the prophecy as crushed, helpless, broken; — *by* its misery and desolation, the channel of blessings to mankind. The more Isaiah, Hezekiah, the Jewish nation, understood this great secret, this divine paradox, the more was each enabled to do the work which they were appointed to do in the world. And this because the image of a higher and more perfect sorrow, of the man who could alone be called *the* man of sorrows, of Him who enabled them to be true sorrowers, of one sympathizing with the mind of God and the woes of His creatures, rose then more clearly and brightly and perfectly before them. Christian brother! if thou believest in such a man of sorrows, ask how thou mayest exhibit His image by suffering with thy fellows. Let Passion-week be indeed a witness to thee that thou art the heir of the same nature, of the same death, of the same redemption, with them. Jew, Turk, Heretic, Infidel brother! try whether thou canst not be what in thy best hours thou desirest to be; then thou wilt believe that thou needest a sacrifice offered for the sins of the whole world; that thou needest a brother, a king, who can make thee at one with thy Father in heaven, and so enable thee to be at one with His children upon earth.

SERMON XVIII.

THE JEW CONQUERING THE NATIONS.

Lincoln's Inn, Easter Sunday. — April 11, 1852.

> Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not. Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy Name is from everlasting. — Isaiah lxiii. 16.

The last passage in Isaiah's prophecies to which I alluded, was that which begins with the words, "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?" I could not doubt that these words contained the description of a mighty conqueror; I could not deny the Jewish assertion, that the whole scenery of the passage, as well as the context of it, led us to think of a Jewish conqueror returning from a victory over Gentile hosts.

This being admitted, the question to be considered was, what is the nature of the triumph here described, how was it or will it be won, in what sense and upon what terms has the Gentile world, represented by these cities of Edom and Bozrah, done homage or will it do homage to the Jewish race, and to a sovereign of Jerusalem? With the consideration of this question, I shall conclude what I have to say upon this great prophet. Without it I believe we could neither understand the visions which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, — when he declared that God had nourished and brought up children, and that they had rebelled against Him, that God would ease Him of His adversaries and avenge Him of His enemies, that the strong should be as tow, and the maker of it as a spark, and that they should both burn together, and none should quench them, — nor that vision of a new heavens and a new earth, when Jerusalem should be a rejoicing and her people a joy, when the voice of weeping should no more be heard in her, nor the voice of crying, which cheered him, as we have been wont to believe, before his race was run and the torch of prophecy was given into some other hand.

I am aware that an argument may be drawn from those allusions to Gentiles upon which I propose to speak, in favor of the notion that the later chapters of this book were not written by Isaiah. Why, it will be asked, should such allusions be so much more frequent in these discourses than in the others? Must not we suspect that they belong to a later stage of the history, when the Jews had been groaning under Gentile government, as in the seventy years' captivity, rather than to the time of Hezekiah, when they had had no such experience? To the first suggestion I answer, that the relations into which Samaria was entering with the heathen Syria, and Ahaz with the heathen Assyria, were the hint and occasion of Isaiah's earliest inspirations; that a struggle between heathendom concentrated in the person of the Assyrian monarch, and the holy city ruled by Hezekiah, is the subject of the chapters *preceding* the fortieth; that what one finds in the succeeding chapters is not the record or anticipation of a conflict of a different kind, but a clear intimation that the same conflict would be prolonged for many generations. To the reason given for referring these discourses to the later years of the captivity, I answer, that the symbols of the warrior who fights with Edom and Bozrah are the symbols of a native prince, and that I cannot see why, upon any view of Isaiah's mission, these should have been more natural in a time when there was no native prince and no prospect of any, — when the restoration of the city, of the temple, of the order of the priests and sacrifices, not the establishment of a throne in Jerusalem, was that which patriots and holy men were expecting, — than to one living in a time when there was such a throne, an actual heir of David sitting upon it, a righteous ruler, one who had been permitted to assert the glory of Israel and of the Lord God of Israel.

I do not refer to the authority of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, to decide this question. It may be said, reasonably enough, that he would of course quote any prophecy by the title which it ordinarily bore in his day, and that he was too much occupied with his subject to engage in a discussion which had no direct bearing upon it. But I refer to him for the light he throws upon the actual intention of the passages which I am considering.

In the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans he had been speaking of the great heaviness and continual sorrow which he had in his heart when he thought of the condition of his countrymen. They were his kinsmen according to the flesh; to them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law and the promises. Theirs were the fathers; "of them," he adds, "as concerning the flesh, Christ has come, who is over all, God blessed for ever." The inheritors of all these mighty blessings were, it seemed to him, cutting themselves off from them. He could not help seeing that a tremendous crisis was at hand, that in a few years the holy city and the temple would be trampled under foot by the Gentiles, that the great empire of the world would extinguish the nation which it had subdued. With that prospect before him, the Apostle had wished — could even then wish — that he might himself be accursed if his race could be preserved. And this was not merely a patriot's passion. The truth and faithfulness of God, upon which his own existence and all his hopes stood, seemed involved in the continued preservation of the people who had been called out to be His witnesses. To contemplate the world without them, was like believing that all the past had been nothing, that the whole scheme of the Divine government had been set at naught and defeated by man's wilfulness. No dream of a possible future, no thought of blessings for new tribes and kindreds of the earth, could console the Apostle under such a thought. It was anguish to him, not as a Hebrew of the Hebrews only, but as a man. For what had man to hope for but the knowledge of God? And if God were other in the present and the future than He had revealed Himself in the past, what knowledge could there be of Him or of His ways?

But a deep discovery had been made to the inmost heart of St. Paul, which had sustained him through that tremendous personal conflict that is described to us in the seventh chapter of his Epistle, and which was not less available in these doubts concerning the destiny of his own race and of mankind. He had been taught that in himself, that is, in his flesh, dwelt no good thing. As a separate creature, he could do nothing that was right to do. Yet there was that in him which was perpetually aiming at something good, perpetually struggling and desiring to be in conformity with this good. This will, this spirit in him, what was it? Whence did it come? It pleased God to show him that there was a mighty Deliverer, who had asserted His own dominion over this feeble, struggling, sinking spirit, who had declared that it had a life in Him which it had not in itself. He believed that this Deliverer was the Son of God, that He had been manifested that men might become sons of God in Him.

Saul of Tarsus, circumcised the eighth day, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel in the straitest sect of his religion, had learnt in mature life that his descent from Abraham, his circumcision, his knowledge of the law, and his strictness in fulfilling it, did not make him a true and righteous man; that circumcision and the law were witnesses that he had no righteousness of his own, but was righteous only in virtue of his relationship to the righteous God. This relationship he now knew to be a real one. Christ, by taking flesh, by dying, by rising again, had proved it to be fixed, eternal, dependent on no accidents, grounded on the divine constitution of things. What a light did this throw upon the calling of the Jewish nation, upon the end for which it existed! Was it not chosen out to testify of this divine relationship? Were not the covenant, and the law, and the promises, all so many declarations that God, who is a Spirit, claims the spiritual creature whom He has formed in His own image, as His servant and His child? Was not the sin of the Jews of St. Paul's day, of the Pharisee as well as of the Sadducee, that he did not estimate enough his own high calling, that he was content to be a child of Abraham, when he should have asserted his right to be a child of God? What was his denial of Jesus, his cry, " This Man blasphemeth, because he saith he is the Son of God," but saying, " There is no relationship, no living bond, between us and God."

Now such men, St. Paul saw, could not be the representatives of the Jewish nation, could not perpetuate its existence. They denied the very law and principle of its existence; they set up a law and principle directly in opposition to that. They said, "We are Jews simply because we can trace our pedigree up to Abraham." By taking that ground, they renounced all that was peculiar in their position, all that made it other and nobler than that of any heathen people. They simply measured their privileges of descent against the privileges of Persian or Greek or Latin descent, when their legislator had heaped contempt upon all such pride, bidding them come with their baskets of fruits before the Lord, and say, "A Syrian ready to perish was my father." In all the most memorable passages of their history, — those which they most delighted to dwell upon, because they seemed to cut them off from the neighboring tribes, — in the rejection of Ishmael, in the preference of Jacob to Esau, a testimony had been given that not the seed of the flesh, but the seed of the promise, was the heir, that God, not Abraham, was the source of their national life. And therefore the Apostle triumphantly argues, that those Israelites who, like himself, were maintaining the reality of these promises, their own actual relationship to God, and were looking upon their descent from Abraham as entirely accidental and subordinate to this, were in fact maintaining the perpetuity of the Jewish nation; that in them God's assurance that its permanence should be greater than that of the hills and mountains, that He had not and would not cast away His people, was vindicated and accomplished.

Now when he has made this statement good by other arguments, and appeals to other passages of Scripture, he adds, "Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved. For He will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness; because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.' And as Esaias said before, 'Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and like unto Gomorrha.'" Here, then, is St. Paul's inspired commentary upon that series of passages in Isaiah's prophecies which speak of a remnant, — a series most memorable and most characteristic of the earlier portion of the book, as some of the learned and intelligent writers who are anxious to separate it from the latter portion have clearly perceived. But understand Isaiah's doctrine respecting the remnant as St. Paul understood it, (and I remarked in a previous lecture, that we must utterly distort the prophet's plainest illustrations, and destroy the contrast as well as the connection of his book, if we put any other sense upon these expressions, if we suppose, for instance, that the remnant were merely a few faithful men saved out of a ruining nation, instead of being the proof that it was not ruined, that the kernel of it lived when the leaves and boughs were broken off,) — and then the most characteristic parts of the later prophecy also acquire a new and striking significance. For instance, the words which I have taken as my text this afternoon, seem as if they were written expressly to establish the truth which St. Paul discovered in the prophet, and by doing so, they illuminate and harmonize a multitude of passages in these discourses with which they have no apparent relation. The sore and tremendous discipline to which the nation has been subjected, leads it to exclaim at last, "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledgeth us not." God had been leading it by all its humiliations to this conviction. Once brought to it, this race was what God had meant it to be; it was capable of doing the work and achieving the victories which He had destined for it.

What these victories were, St. Paul, still continuing to illustrate and interpret Isaiah, will also teach us. He begins by explaining the nature of his countrymen's unbelief. He does it in the words of our prophet. "They stumbled," he says, "at that stumbling-stone, as it is written, 'Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and a rock of offence, and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.'" He makes the application of this passage clear, by saying that his countrymen have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, for being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, they have not submitted to the righteousness of God. "Christ," he adds, "is the end of righteousness to every one that believeth." This foundation, this under-ground of the national fabric, this corner-stone of its unity, he proclaims to be a living and righteous Person. He who stood on this ground, he who believed in this righteous Person, was righteous, was united to his brethren. He who sought to be righteous in himself, lost his righteousness by that very effort; he became selfish, self-exalting, separate from his fellows. The one was "not ashamed," was not disappointed of that which he sought; he had a real righteousness, which made itself visible in his acts. He "did not make haste"; he was not restless, and feverish, striving to justify himself, to make out a case for himself, or to obtain an apparent righteousness in the sight of men. The other was always busy, contriving, inventing fresh plans to make amends for past disappointments, exhibiting no results of his weary activity, but discontent with himself, who was ever twining ropes of sand, discontent with God, who reaped where He had not sown, discontent with his brethren, who were always hindering him or eclipsing him. The quiet faith in the foundation, as opposed to this restlessness, St. Paul describes in words taken from the book of Deuteronomy, and which he interprets by the Divine Light, "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth that Jesus is the Christ, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

He repeats again part of Isaiah's words, that we may know he is still commenting upon them. Then he passes, by what may seem at first a sudden transition, to the Gentiles, and the relation between them and the Jews. "For there is no difference," he says, "between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the Name of the Lord, shall be saved." What is the connection between these passages? I apprehend it is this. As long as his countrymen were seeking to establish their own righteousness, so long they could not acknowledge a common ground for them and for other men to stand upon. They must prove a title for themselves, resting on their hereditary privileges, or on their personal holiness, which would exclude others. But the moment they acknowledged that foundation which *was laid*, the moment they felt it to be the rock on which they were standing, — not a rock of offence, — that moment they confessed a foundation large enough for the whole human race, — they asserted their privilege to be this, that they were heralds of blessing to the human race. St. Paul goes on to show how Isaiah, having seen and understood this to be the basis of his nation's existence and glory, immediately perceived that it *must* be such a herald to the world. He quotes the words from the fifty-second chapter: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" The Apostle does not indeed pretend that these words were first of all applicable to the Gentiles. He knew that the prophet had said in that chapter, "Say to the *cities of Judah*, Behold your God." He knew that the first work of the righteous king, the first duty of every righteous Jew, was to tell *his countrymen* of the covenant which God had made with them, of the foundation which God had laid for them in Zion. But he quotes again from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah the words, "Lord, who hath believed our report?" to show that the message was delivered, and that those to whom it was proclaimed did not receive it. And therefore he adds, "Isaiah becomes very bold, and says, 'I was found of them that sought me not, I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me'; but to Israel he saith, 'All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.'"

These are not mere chance passages taken out for a particular purpose. They suggest hints which discover to us the whole mind of the prophet as well as of the Apostle, and the close national and spiritual sympathy by which, at the distance of seven hundred years, they were united. Isaiah was profoundly convinced that the words which he had quoted from an older seer would be fulfilled, that the mountain of the Lord's house would be established on the top of the mountains, and all nations should flow unto it; from Zion should go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He was learning all his life, till the very end of it, what made such a prediction apparently incredible and impossible, most incredible and impossible to the wisest man who knew his country best. He was all his life, to the very end of it, learning in what way this assurance would be realized. And now that he has fully apprehended the presence of the invisible Redeemer and King, the Wisdom, the Counsellor; now that sorrow has taught him, not only to reconcile the characters of the sufferer, the despised and rejected, with the warrior and the conqueror, but to feel that every great battle must be fought by self-sacrifice, that the greatest conquest must come through the greatest humiliation; now he is prepared for the last and highest revelation, the revelation of the great Head of *Humanity*, of Him in whom *all* the nations are to be blessed. It was not a future king of Israel that was revealed to him, but One who was then reigning. It was not a stone that was to be hereafter laid, that was revealed to him, but one that was laid then. It was not some great champion of humanity who should appear at some distant time, but One who was then, and always had been, the Light of men. It was not some future conqueror that should arise to claim the Gentiles as his subjects; it was One who was then asserting by judgments and deliverances His dominion over all the ends of the earth, who was declaring Himself King of kings, and Lord of lords, who was putting down the inhuman, anarchical, godless power, which asserted its own title to universal dominion.

Isaiah then had a gospel for the nations in his own day. He felt that his high calling as a Jew was to preach that gospel. But if it was a true gospel, it must contain in itself a pledge and promise of acts to be done, that had not yet been done, of words to be spoken that had been kept secret from the foundation of the world. The Word, the Counsellor, the Prince of Peace, could not always be hidden, could not always be seen in imperfect human mirrors, could not always work through secondary agents. The Sufferer could not always be known only in the sufferings of those who had caught a portion of His life and sympathy. The Conqueror could not only assert His dominion over Edom or Bozrah, or over even one mighty empire that tried its strength with His. There must come a moment, when all the subordinate actors in God's drama should give way to the one central hero of it, when all its preparatory conflicts and crises should be gathered up into one which He should carry on alone, having of the people none with Him. "That moment," says St. Paul, "is come. The battle is fought, the victory is won. The Son of God has been down into death, and the grave, and hell. With the enemies of Jews, with the enemies of Gentiles, He has fought. I proclaim Him the Deliverer and King of mankind, the spring and source of a new life, to a race of fallen spirits, — created to be the sons of God, created to bear His likeness. We bid you believe that God, in raising Him from the dead, has claimed you for His children, and given you a right to say, 'Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not.' I bid you not only believe this with your heart, but confess it with your mouth. I bid you say to all the nations, Doubtless he is *your* Father, though you can make out no proof that you are the sons of Abraham. And thus, and thus only, shall the Gentiles be subdued to Judah and Jerusalem; thus only shall it be seen that a word has gone forth from Mount Zion, which has power to make all things new, yea, to create a new heaven and a new earth."

St. Paul has commented upon Isaiah; the history of the modern world has commented upon St. Paul. Is it a dream or a fact, that the Jewish nation has been a sharp threshing instrument, beating in pieces the nations, that it has asserted its dominion over them, that it has compelled them, however reluctantly, to accept the yoke of a Son of David? When you think of those you have seen or heard of who bear the name of Jews, you are disposed to answer that there has been indeed a very powerful influence going forth from them, that all Europe has felt it and confessed it; but that, so far from being a spiritual or elevating influence, it has been utterly immoral and anti-spiritual, the most formal and systematic assertion ever put forth in the world, that money is the power which rules it, — the god which is to be worshipped in it. But a moment's thought will show you, that, when you are making this statement, you are not speaking of a Jewish nation at all, but merely of those who exist in every land to proclaim that there is no Jewish nation, that there is nothing to bind together the fragments which might compose one. However much you may wonder at the mysterious and awful power which these chaotic relics of a former universe have been able to exert over civilized societies, at the influence which they have obtained over the counsels of statesmen and princes; however striking the fact may seem to you (and there are few facts more striking), that in every temple of Mammon there are men bearing witness of a living God, reverencing the books which declare that they are meant to be a race of priests to Him, — you must be very blind to all the records of history, if you suppose that this is the kind of trophy by which the Hebrew race has asserted and is asserting its dominion over Gentile faith and Gentile intellect. The fishermen of Galilee, the tent-maker of Tarsus, when they had once learnt to say, "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledge us not," went forth with that proclamation of a one Father who had sent forth his only begotten Son, to adopt all kindreds of the earth into His family and to baptize them with His Spirit. Before that testimony, proceeding from those insignificant lips, backed by no authority, defended by no subtle arguments, the Roman Pantheon fell down. All the attempts of Greek Neo-Platonic wit and wisdom to reconstruct it, to fill the heavens with a new set of earthly demons surmounted by a philosophical abstraction, failed utterly. The power of emperors was as weak as that of teachers; they struggled, persecuted, succumbed, and were broken in pieces. Was not this the triumphant march of a conqueror, coming with dyed garments, travelling in the greatness of his strength? And was not this Conqueror He of whom it was written in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, "This is the King of the Jews?" And was not the cross on which those letters were written, the symbol of His triumph? Was it not the cross in which, as St. Paul declares, the Wisdom and Power as well as the Love of God manifested themselves to man?

Here was a new heaven, more perfectly a new heaven than Isaiah had ever dreamed of; — a heaven peopled no longer with dark, capricious, malignant forms, such as it appeared to the eye of the poor wayfarer, and no less to the eye of the priest who was busy in devising means of making some one of these forms propitious to the particular locality over which it ruled; nor yet a cold expanse lighted up by a distant star here and there, as it looked to the philosopher; but the home of One, who, of His tender love towards men, gave His only Son to take their flesh upon Him and suffer death, that all mankind should follow the example of His great humility; — a heaven from which there came, and could come, nothing but light and blessing to the earth. And just so far as this new heaven was confessed, as fresh mists from below did not darken and conceal it, there was also a new earth. Men went forth to till and subdue the ground with a sense that they had a Father's blessing and a Father's command to cheer them and give them confidence in the work. The woman rose to her rightful glory as one of *her* race and kindred, whom He that is mighty had magnified; the serf knew that he was the brother of the King who had taken the form of a servant, of the Son who came to make all free. All this came to pass when the root out of the dry ground which Isaiah spoke of proved to be the root of the feelings, thoughts, habits of mind which had sprung up — not untended, not neglected by the Divine Husbandman — on the Gentile soil; when the God of Abraham was shown to be the great King above all gods.

But the new heaven has been darkened with the old idolatrous and evil forms, and therefore the new earth has been stained with the old crimes and oppressions. Christian men, forgetting the great truth which they have inherited from the Jew, have relapsed into heathen notions and conceptions, have thought of God as altogether such an one as themselves. Again and again these tendencies have reached a fearful height in the Christian Church, men have wearied themselves in the greatness of their way, they have become exhausted with their multitudinous superstitions and with the philosophical schemes and scoffs which have encountered them. Then there has come a revival, always brought about by a recurrence — too often a partial and one-sided recurrence — to old Hebrew maxims and principles. Mahometanism proclaiming an absolute Divine Sovereign, to whom all owed allegiance and devotion, struck at one part of the heathenism to which Christendom had yielded. It had the blessed effect of teaching Christendom by its great denial, practically as well as theoretically to grasp the truth, that, if the Sovereign is to be a Father, there must be a Son who is honored even as He is honored. When that belief had degenerated into the acknowledgment of an earthly Father as the centre and bond of Christian society; when heathen notions of sacrifices, heathen confusions between the sacrifice and Him to whom it was presented, had crept in under the shadow of that doctrine; when the classical heathenism which arose with the revival of letters had partly shaken the ecclesiastical heathenism, partly incorporated itself with it; — the Jewish faith of the Reformers appeared with its protest against idolatry, with its assertion of a direct relationship between God and man, with a Gospel from God to man.

But it must not be concealed that Christ is regarded by the successors of Reformers, as well as by those who oppose them, rather as the head of their sect who has persuaded the Lord of the universe to save them from the ruin which He had designed for it, than as the well-beloved Son who has perfectly accomplished His Father's will by giving Himself up for men, in whose loving kindness we see the perfect image of His loving kindness from whom He came, and with whom He dwells. Instead of beginning with a declaration of God's will to men, as Jewish prophets and apostles did, we are trying to heap up mountains by which men may climb to heaven, like the giants of heathen fable. And, as always must be the case where there is such an inversion of right order, our schemes and devices become infinite. Each asserts a right to his own, each complains of the arbitrariness and uncertainty of every other. There are hopeless attempts to settle all questions by appeal to some absolute authority; — as hopeless attempts to settle them by appeals to each man's individual judgment. Divines, churches, sects, dispute; statesmen and economists say that the earth has maxims of its own, which regulate it wholly irrespective of any divine Law of Righteousness, the nature of which we seem unable to settle. Those maxims are found by the peoples of all lands intolerable, setting man against man, making the gold of Ophir precious above all the beings who toil for it. The stronger of them say, "We will have a new earth, at least, since we cannot have a new heaven." Their endeavors to produce one on such conditions prove anarchical and suicidal.

It is no strange faith, at such a time, which many brought up in most different schools seem beginning to entertain, that the old Jewish race may still have its old work to do for the world, that it may reappear as a nation, — a nation of conquerors, — when men least expect it, that so the visions of prophets may very strictly and literally accomplish themselves. It is no strange faith, but one which men reading the book of God's word by the light of facts, find it hard to escape from. I would check no one either in the indulgence of the salutary terrors which may arise in his mind when he reads St. Paul's words, "Thou wilt say, then, 'The branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.' Well, because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also spare not thee." High-minded Greeks, Latins, Teutons! surely we may all think of this solemn saying, and tremble lest God's vineyard, the fruits of which we have not rendered to Him, but taken to ourselves, should be given to another race.

Nor will I quench any hope which has been drawn from the words, " And they also, if they abide not in unbelief, shall be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again." A thought most cheering surely, with whatever punishments to ourselves it may be accompanied; a promise that the new heaven and the new earth shall both have their realization. But I would desire that we should connect these thoughts with two others. One is, that this blessing can only come to the outcasts of Israel when they shall give up saying to themselves, " We have Abraham to our father"; when, renouncing all faith in the power of their gold, in their intellectual gifts, in their Caucasian blood, they shall cry, " Doubtless *Thou* art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not." So they will establish their spiritual descent from all the great men who have been before them, so they will claim to be parts of an organic nation which has never been extinct, because though it has been banished from its old soil it has stood in the person of its Divine King.

The other caution is this. We, brethren, have no right to believe that these prophecies, whatever fresh fulfilments may come out of them, are yet unfulfilled. We exist only to witness of their fulfilment. Easter-day says to us, a new and regenerate life of the universe has begun. We, baptized men, are to tell all nations that it has begun. If you say, " Doubtless Thou art our Father," — to whatever tribe, or race, or nation, you belong, — " our Father, who hast redeemed us, justified us, reconciled us, given us a new and divine life in Thy Son," you dwell in a new heaven. If, in the faith of that heaven and of your citizenship in it, you go forth to all your duties as members of a nation, as members of families, — if you remember that the Lord by whom you live has died and lived for every man whom you meet, that any good you do that man is a good done to Him, that any wrong you do that man is a wrong done to Him, — you will prove that there is a new earth receiving light from that new heaven, an earth wherein also dwelleth righteousness and peace. The visions in the sixty-fifth chapter of Isaiah, visions for Gentiles as well as Jews, are visions indeed of all spiritual blessings, of that which the eye cannot see, nor the ear hear, nor the heart conceive. But grounded on these are visions of earthly blessedness which God has joined to them, which we must not put asunder. "They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build and another inhabit, they shall not plant and another eat. For as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble. For they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call I will answer them, and while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord."

SERMON XIX.

THE VILLAGE GREATER THAN THE CITIES.

LINCOLN'S INN, 1ST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.—APRIL 18, 1852.

> But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. —MICAH v. 2.

MICAH the Morasthite was a contemporary of Isaiah. The word of the Lord is said to have come to him in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. From a passage in Jeremiah, which I shall notice hereafter, it would seem that his prophetical work belongs to the last of these reigns. He was therefore younger than Isaiah. He may have been one of those disciples to whom he committed his testimony. There are many striking resemblances in his short book to the one which we have been examining during the last six weeks. He quotes the passage respecting the last days which Isaiah himself probably quoted from an older prophet. Though his commentary is very different, his attention may first have been drawn to it by hearing Isaiah's discourse. The woes which he denounces upon the great "men of the land, who practise evil because it is in the power of their hand, who covet fields and take them by violence, who oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage," recall those splendid passages in which Isaiah laid bare the corruptions of a time of seeming, nay, of actually commencing, reformation. The hypocrisy of that time presents itself to Micah with the same terrible force as it did to the son of Amos. There is a community of sentiment between them which indicates, I think, more than the fact that they were writing concerning the same condition of society; though one cannot dare positively to affirm that they stood in the relation of master and scholar.

The influence of Isaiah upon him, however exerted, we may be sure served to awaken his spirit, not to crush it, — to make him conscious of a native inspiration, not to supply him with second-hand phrases and notions. He may have had a pious affection for expressions, modes of thought, subjects which his predecessor and guide had first brought before him; he might like to recur to them, nay, prefer them to those which strictly belonged to himself. But his delight in them would arise from the fact, that the hour when he received the lesson was one of new inward revelation; or that, if he did not understand or heed it at first hearing, it came back to him in some time of confusion and distress, telling him where he might find the clearness and deliverance which no school and no mortal voice could impart. I do not know whether there are any passages in this book, which give us more the feeling that Micah was standing face to face with both the visible things and the invisible truths which he speaks of, than those which he has in common with Isaiah, and which some might say he borrowed from him. He appears to have lived in the country parts of Judea, while Isaiah's work was mainly in the city. The phenomena of nature are therefore all familiar to him. He connects with the convulsions of the earth political storms and earthquakes which were about to visit his country. "The Lord cometh forth out of His place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under Him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place. For the transgression of Jacob is all this, and for the sins of the house of Israel." The grasping landholder; the poor man cast out of the house in which his fathers dwelt; the reckless violence of the soldiers spread over the country, "who pulled off the robe with the garment of them that passed by securely as men averse from war"; the women and children driven from their houses by creditors, who, in violation of the Mosaic law, seized their goods and their raiment for the debts of their husbands and fathers, — these are no pictures presented to the imagination of the prophet; he has seen them with his eyes. And when he cries at the sight of them, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest," — meaning by those words, I believe, "Begone, tyrants, into a land of captivity, for you have determined that this land of yours shall be polluted and shall be no resting-place for you or for your brethren," — he has the clearest assurance in his own mind that this must be the effect of the evils which he beholds, though he may have first learnt from Isaiah, or from some other holy man, the eternal connection between mortal sins and divine judgments.

Micah had therefore a special education of his own. Critics have remarked the effect of it in giving a roughness and abruptness to his style, which makes it a striking contrast to the lyrical freedom and richness of Isaiah's. But there is another point, apparently the characteristic one, of Micah's prophecy, which is closely connected with the circumstances of his outward life.

The word of the Lord which came to him, we are told in the first verse of this book, was concerning Samaria and Jerusalem. These cities do not merely stand for the countries of which they were capitals. "What is the transgression of Jacob?" Micah asks at the very commencement of his prophecy. "Is it not Samaria? What are the high places of Judah? Are they not Jerusalem?" In other words, he views all the corruptions of the land, those which were bringing ruin upon every part of it, as gathered up in these the supposed centres of its strength. They stood out as rivals one to another, representing the quarrels and hostility of the tribes. They stood out as the representatives of the religion of Israel and Judah respectively. Though the first calves had been set up in Bethel, Samaria since the time of Ahab had become the seat of the graven images of the gods. She had gathered from all the land the tributes which were to maintain her idolatries. "And all these harlot hires," he now declares, will be carried off into another land, still to be turned to the same use, — to enrich the idol temples of Assyria.

Such an expectation, I said, when I was speaking of a similar prophecy in Isaiah, would have sounded most cheering to the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem, as it was the announcement of the fall of an enemy, — of that country, which then, or a very short time before, they had regarded as their most hateful, nay, even, in conjunction with Syria, as their most formidable enemy. But when Micah contemplates this coming judgment, he "wails like the dragons, and mourns as the owls." And this not merely because a portion of the Lord's people is going into captivity, — that indeed fills him with sorrow, as he sees one and another city and village of the land humbled and crushed by the invader, — but because their captivity is a sure witness of downfall to the whole of it. Samaria with her graven images is not, in Micah's mind, the contrast to Jerusalem, or the rival of it. The evils of one he looks upon as essentially the evils of the other. Therefore he anticipates the same judgments for both.

It is in this way that the prophets tear off the masks which hide the true condition of a people. We are told frequently, that they had the most exclusive preference for the religion of Jehovah, the religion of their fathers, — the most passionate and intolerant hatred of every other. I alluded to this charge when I was speaking of Elijah. I showed you then how the protestant against sensual and divided worship went to Zarephath, a city in the country from whence Jezebel and the Baal-worship came, took refuge with a widow of that city, treated her as one in behalf of whom all the healing powers of the prophet, all the kindly offices of the human brother, were to be exercised. Here is a test of another kind. Micah is writing in the days of Hezekiah. The worship of Jehovah had been reëstablished in Jerusalem; a king, evidently right-minded, had himself been the restorer of it. What a moment for a sectarian prophet to exhibit his gall against the fallen, or falling idolaters, his adulation of the pious monarch, his exultation in the triumph of his own faith! How stand the facts? Micah perceives the same unrighteousness and oppression among the princes of Judah as among those of the ten tribes; therefore he is certain that there is the same practical inward idolatry among them. So far from thinking that the religion of Samaria has destroyed it, and that the religion of Jerusalem will save it, the religion and religious men of the one city, as much as of the other, are those who fill him with terror and trembling. "They build up Zion with blood," he exclaims, "and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the *priests* thereof teach for hire, and the *prophets* thereof divine for money. Yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, 'Is not the Lord among us? None evil can come upon us.'" The men who assumed divine inspiration excited his indignation above all. We have heard how every true prophet has denounced traders in prophecy, the men who lived by flattering rulers or people, who frightened and cajoled them by turns with lying guesses, who strengthened them in sensual worship, in cowardice, oppression, and practical unbelief. But from the time that the promise of Joel began to be fulfilled, when the spirit of the Lord was so remarkably preparing the land for the great and terrible day of the Assyrian invasion, by raising up a race of men of profound insight and foresight, when their office began to acquire something of the stability of the other offices in the commonwealth, when their words were no longer merely preserved in the memories of the people, but reduced to writing, — then the counterfeit race would exhibit a corresponding organization and development. Their trade would become more systematized, their tricks and deceptions less gross, enriched by experience, perfected by the hints and phrases which they could appropriate from the faithful and wise teachers. Accordingly, from this time, we shall find the exposure of these lying seers — not prophets of Baal at all, but men who used the name of Jehovah, canted about the burden of the Lord, regarded the temple with the profoundest veneration — occupying a most conspicuous place in all these books. Such exposures occur frequently in Isaiah; but amidst the many-sided revelations which were made to him, we may easily overlook them. Micah forces them upon us. "If a man," he says, "walking in the spirit and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy to thee of wine and strong drink, he shall even be the prophet of this people." Again: "Thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that make my people err, that bite with their teeth, and cry, Peace; and he that putteth not into their mouths, they even prepare war against him. Therefore night shall be unto you, that ye shall not have a vision; and it shall be dark unto you, that ye shall not divine; and the sun shall go down over the prophets, and the day shall be dark over them. Then shall the seers be ashamed, and the diviners confounded: yea, they shall all cover their lips, for there is no answer of God." The feeling which these passages express is, that the false prophet was far worse than the mere idolater, that he was trifling with the very Spirit of truth, misinterpreting a divine message which he was appointed to deliver. For Micah does not make the falsehood of the prophet consist in this, that he *pretended* to be taught when he had no Divine Teacher, but that he abused the divine teaching to vile, mercenary ends, that, being conscious of a spiritual power and illumination, he acted as if his words were his own, and he might sell them to the service of a great man or a mob. The sacredness of words almost overwhelms the mind of the prophet; he knows them to be powers greater than all which the mightiest animals can put forth, greater than the most wonderful energies of nature. And these, even these, the false prophet thinks he may play with, and use for his own paltry purposes, not considering that he is poisoning the very source of a nation's life, that he is leading men to believe in a Spirit of lies, instead of a God of truth, and in all their daily acts to honor the one and deny the other! It is not wonderful, therefore, that a consciousness of the reality of the divine commission grows stronger in Micah, as he apprehends the infinite wickedness of this perversion of it. "Truly," he says, "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and unto Israel his sin." And he adds boldly, addressing himself to the capital of the house of David, which boasted of its freedom from all the idolatries of Samaria, — addressing himself even to the temple in which Jehovah was worshipped, — "Therefore shall Zion for your sake," (that is to say, for the sake of you, the rulers, the priests, and the prophets,) "be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of the forest."

Yet with all this, he is sure that the words of the old prophet, which his countrymen loved to repeat, would be fulfilled. "The mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established on the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills, and people shall flow unto it." The vision of the fall of Jerusalem, even of the fall of the Temple, does not shake his confidence in the least. It is when he has encountered this vision, and fully considered it, that his hopes become fixed upon a rock. "All people," he says, "will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever." "And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation, and the Lord shall reign over them in Mount Zion, from henceforth, even for ever. And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong-hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem." This strange contradiction, that the city should perish, and become heaps, and yet, that it should become a lawgiver among the nations, — that it should exercise a power which it had never exercised in the days of its splendor, — is the very one which we considered last Sunday, the one which Isaiah brought before us in his later chapters, and of which St. Paul gave so grand an interpretation. But the contrast becomes even more vivid in Micah than it was in Isaiah, both because it is gathered up into fewer sentences, and because the mind of Micah was more especially directed against the pride and glory of the chief city. In the next verse we have the very solution of the difficulty which Isaiah has given us. "Now why dost thou cry out aloud? Is there no King in thee? Is thy Counsellor perished? For pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion. For now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt go even to Babylon. There shalt thou be delivered, there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies." To Micah, as to Isaiah, the great truth has been revealed, that the strength and unity of the nation stood not in any city, but in the invisible King who was reigning within that city. To him it has been revealed, that the nation must pass through a death-travail, before the full power of life which is within it can be manifested. To him it has been made known, that there must be a battle between the Jerusalem and the Babel power, and a great apparent victory of the latter, before the chosen people can freely fulfil its appointed task.

Micah adds, "Now also many nations are gathered against thee, that say, 'Let her be defiled, and let our eye look upon Zion.' But they know not the thoughts of the Lord, neither understand they His counsel, for He shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion, for I will make thy horn iron, and I will make thy hoofs brass, and thou shalt beat in pieces many people." We have here some of those phrases which remind us so powerfully of Isaiah, and make us feel that Micah may have studied in his school. And it is not merely an outward resemblance. The actual Assyrian invasion led Isaiah to meditate upon the Babel power generally; the news of a revolution in the city of Babylon and the embassy from Merodach-Baladan led him to foresee the perils to which Jerusalem would afterwards be exposed from that land. Micah in like manner connects all that is hereafter to befall Zion with the crisis she was passing through in his time. He evidently anticipates that her travail will even then issue in a glorious birth, that the King of Judah shall even then be great, unto the ends of the earth.

But there is one passage in this part of Micah's prophecy to which there is nothing corresponding in Isaiah. It is that which I have chosen for my text. "And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." The humiliation of Jerusalem has been especially present to the mind of our seer. Though it calls itself the city of David, he believes that there will be a stain upon its glory. He is taught to remember that David's own birthplace was not that city, but a little village, insignificant amidst the thousands of Judah. He is led to anticipate that this place, celebrated besides as that in which Rachel travailed and died, will in some way be connected with a ruler and deliverer, who should "stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the Name of the Lord his God, — who should be the peace when the Assyrian should come into the land, — who should waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof." Such expressions sufficiently show that Micah looked to this Ruler as a present helper and deliverer, as one who should set Judea free from the enemies who were *then* oppressing it. And yet this same Person was also to do works which could not be accomplished in that generation, which must spread through many generations. The prophet could hardly suppose that the enemies of Judah would then be completely destroyed; for he had spoken of a terrible discomfiture and captivity, as preceding the emancipation. And even if he had such a thought, the last words refer to a gradual influence which his countrymen were to exert over other lands. "The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." This is precisely the kind of influence which the Jews in the Babylonian empire, or elsewhere, might exert, when they were no more united in a holy city, but when they became conscious of another more mysterious unity in a Divine King, who made their apparent dissolution the means of binding them more effectually and inwardly together.

I apprehend that Micah was divinely appointed to speak of this unity, especially in opposition to that other artificial and material unity which his countrymen were resting in. In this sense, he contrasts Bethlehem with Jerusalem. He may not have perceived in what way the Ruler, or Shepherd he spoke of, would be connected with Bethlehem. The name may have been a seed dropped in the ground to die and bear fruit some other day. Nor may he have had as distinct and full a view of the Shepherd himself as Isaiah had. Yet he saw as clearly that He could not be confounded with any temporary earthly prince. "His goings forth were of old, from everlasting." He had been the King in the days of David and Solomon, He had not been deposed among the ten tribes because Jeroboam set up calves in Bethel. Whether Ahaz stooped to Assyria, or Hezekiah shook off its yoke, He remained the same. All great days of the Lord were days which revealed His presence. Material earthquakes, invasions of Sennacherib, all forms of evil and confusion, were proclaiming Him as the only rock upon which that nation could stand. Its high calling was to declare Him as the rock upon which all men must stand.

A very memorable chapter of Micah's prophecy follows that of which I have been speaking; it is the one which our Church has chosen as a specimen of the whole book. I believe the selection has been rightly made, and not only on account of its sublimity. "Hear ye, O mountains, the Lord's controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with His people, and He will plead with Israel." This chapter contains all the great characteristics of Micah's prophecy, and leads us to the innermost heart of it. A God whose voice is echoed by the hills and mountains, caring to reason with His people, explaining to them His own ways and judgments, beseeching them to listen to Him! — think of such a Being presented to the mind of a man who is bowing down to a mere God of power, whom he fancies that by some means or other he is to appease. And such a God was the God of the priests and prophets of Samaria and Jerusalem, whose falsehoods Micah had been laying bare. An utterly dark and false notion of Him lay at the root of all their contrivances and impostures. Till they thought otherwise of Him, they must be self-deceivers, and deceivers of their brethren.

And yet there was nothing new in Micah's view of the Divine character; it was precisely the one which the law and history of Israel had been setting forth. "O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." Nay, the false prophet, the very type of false prophets, himself had been brought in an hour of humiliation and revelation to confess that this was the Being with whom he had to do. "O my people, remember now what Balak, king of Moab, consulted, and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him from Shittim unto Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." This was the answer of the man whose eyes were opened, who saw the vision of the Almighty. "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt-offerings and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" God uses Balaam as a teacher of the prophets and priests and people of Israel. These words explain the cause of the judgments which He is bringing upon them. There are wicked balances, there are bags of deceitful weights. "The rich men are full of violence; the inhabitants of the cities have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their mouth. Therefore is He making them sick in smiting them, and making them desolate in their sins." A wonderful passage surely,—

proving, I think, that all substantial, practical morality must have its basis in a substantial theology; — how needful it is that we should confess a righteous God if we would be righteous ourselves; — what a mockery it is to call upon men to be just and honest, if we do not present God to them as One who is seeking to make them what He is; — how utterly vain and vague all spiritual teaching is, merely tending to pamper spiritual pride and produce spiritual wickedness, if it does not connect the commonest outward acts with all inward and mysterious principles.

The last passages in Micah describe a tremendous struggle in his own mind, when he looked round and saw the faithlessness, heartlessness, selfishness, of the people among whom he was dwelling, of that people with whom God was holding this controversy. "The best of them is as a brier; the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge. The day of thy visitation cometh." There is a dark moment in which he exclaims, "Trust ye not in a friend. Put ye not confidence in a guide; keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom." But that hour passes away. "I will look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me." His anger against others ends in a confession of his own evil. "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against Him, until He plead my cause and execute judgment for me." And then comes a vision of blessedness for his land as well as for himself. "Who is a God like unto Thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passes by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He retaineth not His anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, He will have compassion upon us, He will subdue our iniquities. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which Thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old."

There are two comments upon Micah, one in the Old, one in the New Testament, which throw, I think, great light upon this book, and upon the nature of prophecy, and contain much instruction for ourselves. We are told in the twenty-sixth chapter of Jeremiah, that the priests and the prophets spoke unto the princes and unto all the people of Jerusalem, saying, "This man Jeremiah is worthy to die, for he hath prophesied against this city as ye have heard with your ears." Jeremiah told them that he was in their hands, but if they put him to death they would bring innocent blood upon themselves and upon the city. "Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, Micah the Morasthite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and spake to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Zion shall be ploughed like a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.' Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, and all Judah, put him at all to death? Did he not fear the Lord, and beseech the Lord, and the Lord repented of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus might we procure great evil against our souls." Now it should be remembered, that Micah's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem was not fulfilled, as he perhaps expected it to be, in his own day. There was therefore a pretext for saying he was a false prophet like those whom he had denounced. But the wisest of the elders of the people of Judah felt that this was not the test of truth and falsehood. Micah had spoken right; he had declared that certain effects must follow from certain causes. Where there was pride, oppression, hypocrisy, there would be judgments, there would at last be utter destruction. Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem, Hezekiah humbled himself; the city and temple were preserved. But the words lived on, — established, not belied, by that apparent confutation of them. The conscience of the people in Jeremiah's day recognized them as addressed to themselves; their literal accomplishment to that generation stamped them as sure decrees for Jerusalem, and for every other city of the earth, in all generations to come.

The passage in the New Testament is this. "When Herod had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judah. For thus it is written by the prophet: 'And thou, Bethlehem in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people Israel.'" There are those who would discredit this passage of St. Matthew's Gospel, because, they say, it was so likely that this prophecy should have been thought to be applicable after the event, so unlikely that it should have suggested itself to any as determining such an event. I apprehend, from all we know of the Jewish mind either before or since that time, it was exceedingly likely that all passages of this kind would be noted in connection with the coming of the expected King, and that precisely the part of them which would fix the attention of the Rabbis would be the topographical, or merely incidental, part. I do not see that it was any disparagement to their wisdom, that they recognized a divine order and contrivance even in such circumstances as these. Places sometimes serve very remarkably to connect together different periods in the life of an individual man. A house or field which belonged to the associations of the child becomes quite unexpectedly identified with the history of his later years. Old men long to lay their bones where they played as boys. Devout men welcome such coincidences and recurrences as proofs that they are under a divine education. Why should the like be wanting in a national story? Why should they not be noted in a book which traces all the parts of it as the fulfilment of a divine purpose? We do not complain of the Jewish doctors, because they had skill in detecting such indications in their Scriptures, but because they could detect no others. Micah saw that honor had been put and would be put on Bethlehem, to humble the pride of Jerusalem. The scribes, full of the pride of their city, full of personal pride, could read the name of the village; the moral of it was utterly lost upon them. And therefore when He who was born at Bethlehem appeared before them as the man of Nazareth, Micah's sentence, which might have enabled them to understand that part of Christ's humiliation also, became a stumbling-block to them. "Search and look," they said, "for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." The signs and tokens of the Divine Man were nothing; the place was every thing. And the last words were utterly forgotten. They thought of One who was to come as their Ruler and Prince. They did not think of One whose goings forth had been of old, from everlasting. They wanted a stronger Herod, a native Augustus: they did not want God manifest in the flesh.

And, dear brethren, it will not avail us much to believe that a child has been born at Bethlehem 1850 years ago, or even to believe that He will come again in the glory of His Father and of the holy Angels. Unless we confess Him as our Ruler and Shepherd now, our thoughts of His past humiliation and of His future greatness will alike deceive us. Our pride will not give way before the dim recollection of what He was, our hopes will not be kindled by the vague dream of what He may be. To know that He IS and that He is with us as He was with our forefathers, and as He has promised to be with our children's children, this is the strength and consolation that we need; this only can enable us to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God. His going forth was of old, from everlasting; therefore may we bring Him our gold and frankincense and myrrh, as those did who kneeled before the cradle in the manger; therefore may we hope to be like Him, when we shall see Him as He is, in that kingdom which shall have no end.

SERMON XX.

THE EVIL CITY SAVED AND DESTROYED.

Lincoln's Inn, 2d Sunday after Easter. — April 25, 1852.

The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.
— Nahum i. 1.

There are two prophetical books in the Old Testament which have no direct reference to the chosen people, those of Jonah and of Nahum. Both of them are concerned with the fate of Nineveh. I alluded to Jonah when I was speaking of Jeroboam II., in whose reign he is said to have lived. But I *merely* alluded to him because I was then occupied with the history of the ten tribes, upon which the Book of Jonah throws no light, and because that book, though it records a passage in the life of an old prophet, does not profess to have been written by him. It may have been put together, as eminent critics think it was, in a time much later than that of Jeroboam. I now propose to speak of these prophets. The city of which they both speak was the capital of the empire which has been brought so frequently before us by Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. Jonah and Nahum, though they contemplate this empire in different periods, both see it, not triumphant, but tottering. They present it therefore to us in a new point of view, and they illustrate the office of the Jewish prophet the more strikingly for their apparent neglect of Jewish affairs.

The book of Jonah, the son of Amittai, has seemed to some so curiously contrived to explain that office and the office of the Jewish people, that they have fancied it contains a parable instead of a history. Several circumstances have tended to strengthen them in this opinion. I have admitted that it differs from the other books with which it is associated in that it appears to be a narrative written by a third party, rather than a discourse proceeding from the person whose name it bears. Moreover, there is one event related (very briefly) in that narrative, which has drawn away the minds of readers, especially trivial and superficial readers, from the other parts of it. The passion for mere wonderment is in general so little gratified by the sacred records, — so much less than by almost any books ancient or modern that one can read, — the divine element in these books is so closely associated with common earthly life, its miracles are such assertions of eternal laws, and such protests against the irregular acts of the magician and the enchanter, that those who in their hearts prefer an Oriental, classical, or middle-age legend to their plain statements of facts or profound revelations of principles, eagerly seize upon every Biblical story which has obviously a rare and exceptional character. The enemies of the Scriptures of course readily gratify their propensity, allowing them to maintain, and vigorously supporting the opinion, that these are the standards by which we are to judge the book; that throughout it is in contradiction to human experience, not the discovery of something which lies deeper than human experience. Accordingly the words, "The Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah: and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights," have given occasion to a series of refinements, speculations, explanations, arguments, respecting the nature and possibility of the incident, which it is wearisome and humiliating to read or to think of. One who considers how great and wonderful a thing a preservation from the deep is, who believes that the Lord is the author of every such preservation, who feels at the same time that he does not understand and is never likely to understand the method of this particular preservation, dwells on that which must at all events be the essence of the story, and leaves its accidents as he finds them. To the mere hunter for rarities and curiosities, the accident is every thing, the essence nothing. He pores over the whale, he forgets God. To the mere critic the appearance of such a prodigy is decisive as to the character of the whole story. It must be merely composed, he concludes, for the sake of a moral; it either is not meant to describe what actually occurred, or the narrator was deceived by a loose tradition of it which had come down from a distant age.

Now assuredly if a holy man of some later time were led to meditate upon a story which had been preserved respecting some venerable seer, and to put it forth for the benefit of his contemporaries, there is no doubt that the truth which he saw in it would be more important in his eyes than the man who was the subject of it, or than any good or ill fortune which befell him. He would not have been a holy or inspired man if he had not cared more to understand the principles of God's government, and to make them known, than to hear or tell any new thing. But a fact may embody a divine meaning at least as well as a fiction. The self-will and transgression of an actual individual may be the most complete of all parables to illustrate the self-will and transgressions of his class or his nation. A man should be an artist to write a biography as much as to write a romance; he will not make the story of a life intelligible if he has not some knowledge beyond what he derives from the mere statistics of it. A divine artist we might expect would especially delight to show us how a few years or days of a man's experience may exhibit, as in a glass, not only the meaning of his own vocation, but the vocation of his order and race, and so might gather into itself centuries and cycles of history.

I can find no pretext for the notion that the book of Jonah does not describe actual events and actual processes in the heart of a real man. It does not bear the slightest resemblance to any of the books which are compiled in after times to magnify the characters of heroes and saints, upon whom a vague traditional glory rests. Jonah, who is said to have foretold the success of Jeroboam II., who must have been remembered with honor in all parts of the land, is here presented to us, not as a model, but as a beacon; not as embodying in himself all the transcendent qualities of a seer or the higher graces of a man, but as disobedient, selfish, hard-hearted. A sophist using an old name to conceal a composition of his own, betrays the fraud by some chronological inaccuracy and some violation of costume. The critics and condemners of this narrative admit that they do not detect any of these signs here. Nineveh was beginning to be known in the Holy Land in the reign of Jeroboam II.; it was the very reign in which Amos went into the North country and told how its seeming prosperity would be crushed by a new and strong invader. There was the vague grandeur then attaching to a great capital which might well terrify a humble Israelite. His flight to Joppa and the finding a ship sailing to Tarshish are incidents quite as suitable to that age as to any subsequent one. It is very true that there are no specific circumstances recorded concerning the nature of the calamity which was to come upon the city, such as we should certainly look for in a contemporary record. "Within forty days and Nineveh should be destroyed," is all that we hear. Such an omission indicates that the writer of the narrative had an object which made him indifferent about details; for his purpose it did not signify whether the city was in danger of plague, famine, or invasion. It had perished perhaps already. Nineveh had become to him only a name. But the want of these accessories indicates also his simplicity and guilelessness. A man conscious of invention would have availed himself of some local traditions to make his tale plausible. And if we turn from the outside of the story to its inward characteristics, we shall find, I believe, a moral coherency and truth in it which will make us inclined to think that its figurative worth cannot be separated from its worth as a document concerning one of our own flesh and blood. Jonah is in fact more completely the combination of the individual with the prophet, than one finds anywhere else. We shall see the two characters blended and struggling together in Jeremiah; much of the deep pathos of his book consists in their conflict; but in Jonah the poor insignificant creature of the earth stands out in the same strong contrast to the man transfigured by a divine calling and impulse, which we have traced through all the earlier books. A voice, strong and clear, tells him that he is to go to Nineveh and denounce its wickedness. He has no doubt whence that voice proceeds. But the mission is a strange and terrible one. He runs from it; he is in a storm; that storm he is sure is pursuing *him*, testifying against *him*. He tells his heathen comrades so. They are not guilty of producing the storm, but he is; if they would be saved, he must be cast out. They are unwilling to execute the sentence which he has pronounced upon himself; they toil hard in rowing, but in vain; they must obey the prophet. In the jaws of desolation and death, he cries to God, confesses his sin, submits to his punishment. He is delivered and goes forth once more on his errand. The king and people listen to him, humble themselves in dust and ashes, show all signs of a true conversion. The city is spared. The prophet complains that he has been mocked; that that has not come to pass which he said would come to pass. He goes forth in his anger to the east side of the city, makes him a booth and sits under the shadow of it that he may see what will become of the city. "And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm when the morning arose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.' And God said to Jonah, 'Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?' And he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death.' Then said the Lord, 'Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?'"

The writer of this book must have been a very courageous as well as a very profound man to have imagined a story of this kind. For it strikes at every prejudice which was most close to the heart of his countrymen. It lays bare their national disease. It attacks these prejudices and exhibits this disease, not in a formal didactic manner, but by discovering a train of thought the most natural and likely to have arisen in the mind of a Jew or a man; yet the one which the countrymen of a prophet and we ourselves should be most slow in attributing to him. We are taught that a prophet of the ten tribes, an almost immediate successor of Elisha, was sent as a witness into a heathen land, a land beyond the circle — so he must have believed — of the covenant and the promises. We are told, nevertheless, that it was a completely overpowering divine conviction which was driving him there. He felt it was his duty not to speak to the king of Samaria, or the priests in Bethel, but to tell men whom he only knew of as idolaters, that the God of his fathers was their God, and would punish them for their iniquities. We may remember how Abraham felt and acted when he came among a people in whom he said the fear of God did not dwell. It was still more likely that Jonah should tremble at the thoughts of what might befall him in a city which he was openly to defy; that he should be quite unable to understand how God's words could reach such a people, what they had to do with Him. It must have been a strange discovery to him, that the mariners in his ship had that in them which recognized the Being of whom he spoke, and that they showed a kindliness and a sense of righteousness which he could not give himself credit for. It must have been stranger still to feel, that the God whose servant he was, the God who had chosen his nation, was charging him with a sin which He did not charge upon them; that he stood really and consciously guilty of that of which they were not guilty. In whatever prison-house Jonah's body was shut up, this was a prison-house for his spirit, close, narrow, stifling, beyond all imagination, one from which it seemed as if there could be no escape. A favored man no longer, his preëminence above others seemed to be that he was the bearer of a heavier burden, that he was crushed under a more terrible curse. And yet out of this deep pit he could be heard. There was a deliverer even there; God had known him, and had not forgotten him even while He had been teaching him to regard himself as worse than those whom he had supposed were entirely excluded from the Divine compassion. He is yet a servant and prophet of the Most High, he may yet perform His work. He is a new man; he who was lately shut up in death, can speak of God's truth and righteousness. That is what he seems appointed to speak of. Though he has experienced much mercy, he is not told to proclaim mercy. He is to cry aloud in all the streets of the great Nineveh, that sin has been committed and that sin must bring death. He has been used to utter such sounds in Samaria, and they have fallen utterly dead. No one has thought them worth listening to. Unspeakable marvel! Here, instead of being dead words, they seem able to waken the dead. They are confessed to come from One who has a right to speak them, from One of whom Jonah perhaps thought the king and people of Nineveh were utterly ignorant.

The message has done its work. God has triumphed. But Jonah has not triumphed. He is utterly confounded and sick at heart; he has deceived others and deceived himself. He had expected to see men, women, children, cattle, all perishing; but they all lived. He had expected,— had he hoped it? Yes, that truth is brought home to him; he had *wished* that it should be so. But that blessed gourd which had shadowed him from the heat; had he wished that to perish? was he content that it should? No, when that withered, he was angry unto death; he did well to be angry. Jonah cared for the gourd; he was taught that God cared for the men and women and children and cattle of Nineveh. He was taught that the mind of Him who sent the message to the city, and the mind of him who bore it, were not at one, but at war. And this was the blessing of the servant, his highest blessing, that his mind should not be at war with his Master's, but at one with it.

So then it was the result of all this discipline that the Jewish prophet knew he was to be the herald of God's mercy as well as of God's righteousness to all the nations, nay, that he could not be the herald of the one unless he were also of the other. God's righteousness is shown in making men righteous. If they will submit to be made so, then His end is accomplished; if they will resist, then His vengeance will go forth, not because He has forgotten mercy, but because that which is unmerciful and hard-hearted shall not possess the earth which He claims for His dominion.

This truth connects the vision of Nahum with that of Jonah. It had been proved that an Assyrian monarch and people were under the government of the same righteous and gracious Lord who had chosen Israel for His inheritance. It was proved that there was an ear in an Assyrian monarch and people which could be opened to hear God's word, a heart which could acknowledge His presence and His authority. The evidence had been clear and triumphant, that there was nothing in the circumstances of that people or any people which made it impossible that they should understand God's word and should yield to it. But they chose another course. Lucifer, the son of the morning, became the pattern of Assyrian kings. To exalt themselves above law, to make the earth a wilderness, had been the ambition of the whole empire. And therefore Jonah's words were as true and as much alive as when he first pronounced them. If the city had perished when he desired it to perish, the truth of God would have been immeasurably less asserted than it was by the reformation which delayed, and the evil doings which brought down, the punishment.

There has been much doubt about the time in which Nahum lived. He is described simply as the Elkoshite. Jerome speaks of a village bearing a name like this in Galilee, and even says that a few relics of it were pointed out to him by a dweller in the district. Such a testimony is, of course, much more valuable than that of any Church father unacquainted with Palestine; if it were received, we should have no reason for not accepting Jerome's other suggestion, that Nahum wrote in the days of Hezekiah to console the tribes which had just been taken captive, by the prospect of the destruction of their oppressor at some distant day. But there is that in the character of the prophecy which has forced modern students to think of a different place as well as time from those which Jerome imagined. The exceeding vividness of all the descriptions seems to indicate that Nahum was placed in the heart of the country which he was threatening. The divine illumination of the Prophets had a higher object than to make them acquainted with natural scenery or with the outward condition of a land. These, as we have observed in the cases of Amos, Hosea, Micah, were brought directly before their eyes and ears. They heard the sound of the earthquake; the army of locusts was devouring the land in which they were dwelling; the Assyrian was come to Aiath, he had passed to Migron, at Michmash he had laid up his carriages, when Isaiah called his countrymen to turn to the God of their fathers. Those who think that the prophets lose any of their divinity when we thus connect them with present and passing events, have, I fear, borrowed their notions of what is divine from heathen oracles, from the soothsayers and diviners whom the prophets denounce, and whom they existed to put down. The meaning of the most distant future emerges out of their discourses, not when we divorce them from local and immediate occurrences, but when we see how they brought eternal truths to bear upon them. For this reason it is strictly according to analogy, I think, to suppose that Nahum did not live before the captivity of the ten tribes, or just at the commencement of it, but that he was one of that captivity. A village named Alcosh, not far from Mosul, has been pointed out as the probable place of his birth or residence; it is a reasonable supposition that he lived just when Cyaxares and the Medes were threatening Nineveh, which, according to all authorities, they utterly destroyed. The date of that event has been settled, apparently on good evidence, as falling between the years 610 and 600 before Christ. If this view of the prophecy be the true one, it gives us some hints respecting the tribes in their Assyrian banishment which we cannot obtain elsewhere. The Apocryphal book of Tobit throws a valuable light upon their personal and domestic life, and shows how the good men among them cherished the old faith and the old sympathies. But the deeper learning which they derived from the events that befell the great world about them, — the way in which those events confirmed the past history of their country, and assured them that the truths which it had revealed would stand the test of all possible circumstances, were not affected by their own overthrow, would make themselves good in all ages to come, — this must be understood from some more instructed and less superstitious Israelite than Tobit.

Great revolutions were then shaking Asia. The Median power had for some time been the mightiest; the irruption of Scythian hordes for a while checked its advances; when they melted away or emigrated towards the west, the destined hour for the fall of the old Assyrian tyranny was come. The period that followed brings to light the Babylonian empire, of which Nebuchadnezzar was the restorer, and in which the old Chaldean faith and wisdom were to reappear in new strength, probably combined with some new elements.

What had a lonely captive to do with such convulsions as these? how could he interpret them? They threw him back upon Him who is, and was, and is to come. The rise and overthrow of dynasties repeated the two great seemingly opposed lessons which his own suffering had been teaching him.

"God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious: the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet." — i. 2, 3.

O comfort beyond and beneath all words that he can speak, all thoughts that he can think! There is an order in the midst of this anarchy; there is a Person upholding this order! He is not unconcerned about that which is going on in His earth. Medes, Babylonians, Scythians, captive Jews, — not one is forgotten. He — the least of all, the lowest of all — he can say, This God is our God, I know what His purposes are, I know the will that is guiding us through the storms and hurricanes by which thrones and kingdoms will be swept away. The seeming contrasts in the laws of the universe, which staggered others, found a reconciliation in the heart of this outcast.

"Who can stand before His indignation? And who can abide in the fierceness of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him. The Lord is good, a strong-hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."—i. 6, 7.

The oppressor is falling:—

"And the Lord hath given a commandment concerning thee, that no more of thy name be sown: out of the house of thy gods will I cut off the graven image and the molten image: I will make thy grave; for thou art vile."—i. 14.

But then, again:—

"Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off."—i. 15.

So speaks, with deep, pathetic energy, one who can no longer keep the solemn feasts except in secret, who sees nothing but molten images all around him. He implores his countrymen to consider what those things mean which have become to them mere names and forms of something departed and dead. They are witnesses of a living, and true, and gracious God. They are good tidings for the whole earth, that the Lord is not an Evil Spirit, but one who has made man to be His servant and His child, who will destroy the bloody city that is full of lies and robbery, let it be where it may, let it have what greatness it may.

"Woe to the bloody city! it is all full of lies and robbery; the prey departeth not; the noise of a whip, and the noise of the rattling of the wheels, and of the prancing horses, and of the jumping chariots. The horseman lifteth up both the bright sword and the glittering spear: and there is a multitude of slain, and a great number of carcasses; and there is none end of their corpses; they stumble upon their corpses: because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the well-favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts. Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts; and I will discover thy skirts upon thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame. And will cast abominable filth upon thee, and make thee vile, and will set thee as a gazing-stock. And it shall come to pass, that all they that look upon thee shall flee from thee, and say, Nineveh is laid waste: who will bemoan her? Whence shall I seek comforters for thee?" — iii. 1 – 7.

"All thy strong-holds shall be like fig-trees with the first-ripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater. Behold, thy people in the midst of thee are women: the gates of thy land shall be set wide open unto thine enemies: the fire shall devour thy bars. Draw thee waters for the siege, fortify thy strong-holds: go into clay, and tread the mortar, make strong the brick-kiln. There shall the fire devour thee, the sword shall cut thee off; it shall eat thee up like the canker-worm: make thyself many as the canker-worm, make thyself many as the locusts. Thou hast multiplied thy merchants above the stars of heaven: the canker-worm spoileth, and fleeth away. Thy crowned are as the locusts, and thy captains as the great grasshoppers, which camp in the hedges in the cold day; but when the sun ariseth they flee away, and their place is not known where they are. Thy shepherds slumber, O king of Assyria: thy nobles shall dwell in the dust: thy people is scattered upon the mountains, and no man gathereth them. There is no healing of thy bruise; thy wound is grievous: all that hear the bruit of thee shall clap the hands over thee: for upon whom hath not thy wickedness passed continually?" — iii. 12–19.

The books of Jonah and Nahum, then, taken together, enable us to contemplate a great historical cycle. The one stands at the beginning, the other at the end of a period. The Assyrian empire comes before us in its first and in its last relations to the chosen people, or rather to that which is higher than the chosen people, — the witness which they were to bear for the God of the whole earth. If the compiler of the book of Jonah, in the form in which we have it, lived subsequently to Nahum, he was called to supply a chasm in the life of his people, by showing the work which from the very first they had to do for the surrounding nations, by explaining how a failure in that work was a sentence of death upon themselves. Nahum not only carries on the testimony of Jonah respecting the certain doom of an evil city; he also shows us how the called race in its deepest humiliation, as much as in its greatest prosperity, was still the preacher to the human race, how its existence as well as its words interpreted the mystery of the universe, and made the rise and fall of empires, with all the dark crimes that led to both, give out pledges of consolation and hope.

And thus we are enabled to understand better the New Testament use of these Old Testament teachers. To Nahum I am not aware that there is any direct allusion in the Gospels. Jonas the prophet is referred to in a memorable discourse of our Lord's recorded both by St. Matthew and St. Luke. There is a passage in the twelfth chapter of St. Matthew, to which there is no parallel in St. Luke, and which apparently breaks the connection between the thirty-ninth and forty-first verses of the chapter in which it occurs. It is the one which says that as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. I dare not venture to use this passage for the establishment of any doctrine, because I have heard no satisfactory explanation of it.

The solemn week, through which we have lately passed, has taught us that the period between our Lord's death and resurrection was not three days and three nights. We cannot give up the direct assertions of all the Evangelists, the sacred convictions of eighteen centuries, that we may force the greatest facts in the history of the world into accordance with this sentence. It would be a far less serious alternative to admit that it may have crept into the text from the gloss of some commentator, just as the most intelligent divines have yielded to the belief that a text affirming an infinitely more important doctrine crept into the fifth chapter of the first Epistle of St. John; an admission which, so far from weakening their faith in that doctrine, has helped them to see it unfolding itself through the whole of Scripture and underlying the history of the Church and of mankind, when they were apt to look for the main proof of it in a single text. I do not say that we have any authority for so bold a course as this. I merely urge it as a duty that we should be silent when we are ignorant. If we have real reverence for Scripture, and a firm belief in that which it declares, we shall never strain a single one of its words or phrases, or strain a single fact to make it fit them.

Abstinence from such dishonesty will assuredly bring its reward in clearer apprehensions of the whole record hereafter.

But the words, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it but the sign of the prophet Jonas," illustrated by the words of St. Luke, "As Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall the Son of Man be to this generation," as well as by the further words, "The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation and shall condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold a greater than Jonas is here," contain a meaning which is not affected by the omission of this clause. The Jews asked our Lord for a visible sign in the heavens to confirm his authority. He answered them that Jonah himself and the message which he brought were sufficient signs to the heathens of Nineveh. Their consciences confessed that God was speaking to them; they felt that a King whom they could not see was near them claiming their homage; they turned to Him. The Jews, the people of God, chosen out of all the countries to acknowledge that unseen presence and proclaim it, — they had become such idolaters, so blind and deaf in heart that they could believe only some outward visible image; the cry to turn to their King was utterly lost upon them. He himself was among them, the Word by whom all their prophets had spoken, the King who was sitting on the holy hill of Zion. Why were they not able to hear Him? Was it not because He was the Son of Man? because He came with a message to man, and they, shut up in their pride and exclusiveness, did not like to take up their position among men, did not care for a voice which was addressed to men? The people of Nineveh therefore repented at the preaching of Jonah;

the people of Jerusalem did not repent at the preaching of Jesus. The Jew, because he was inhuman, was necessarily ungodly. He would not acknowledge the Son of Man; practically he could not believe in Jehovah. And so the city, that holy city, would become the bloody city; in it would be fulfilled the law which had been fulfilled in the Assyrian capital. Awful and everlasting witness of the divine order; which asserted itself without respect of persons then, which will assert itself without respect of persons always! The Christian Church, the Church of the human race, has been almost as slow to maintain its true privilege of preaching the glad tidings of Love and Truth to the human race as the Jewish nation, its forerunner, was. Christian prophets have shrunk from their commission, fled from the face of the Lord, been angry that God was more gracious than they were, mourned over their perishing gourds, have distrusted Him who cares for the men and the women and the cattle in every country under heaven. But the Church must publish God's righteousness and God's grace to men, let its members be ever so unwilling. If the tongues of prophets are silent, if divine feasts and worship cease, then, by its own captivity, it will be taught itself, it will teach mankind, who is its King, its Judge, its Saviour.

SERMON XXI.

MANASSEH AND JOSIAH: ZEPHANIAH AND HABAKKUK.

Lincoln's Inn, 3d Sunday after Easter. — May 2, 1852.

Behold his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith. — Habakkuk ii. 4.

There is a tradition that Isaiah survived Hezekiah, and suffered death in the days of Manasseh. Even the manner of his death has been determined; it has been said that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers to him when he speaks of some having been sawn asunder. A vague rumor of this kind cannot be of the least help in determining the application of a prophecy, and there are no words in the book of Isaiah which warrant us in extending any part of it beyond the time denoted by the opening verse. The belief that he became a martyr arose from the improbability that any righteous man could be suffered to live in the days of Manasseh.

These days are described to us as darker than any which had preceded them in the kingdom of Judah. "The king did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove, as did Ahab, king of Israel, and worshipped all the host of heaven and served them. And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he made his son pass through the fire, and observed times and used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards. . . . . . Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." — 2 Kings xxi. 2 – 16.

This state of things must have lasted a long time. He was but twelve years old when he began to reign, so that the violent change may not have begun at once, though it is quite possible that some of the counsellors, who had brought vain oblations, and been very active on the new moons and Sabbaths during the reign of his father, may have cultivated all the superstitious and idolatrous tendencies that were ripening in the mind of the son, and may have encouraged him to set up groves and high places even during his minority. However, as he reigned fifty and five years, this supposition is hardly necessary to account for the extent and completeness of the reaction. Nor will any attentive reader of Isaiah and Micah feel astonished by it. They, especially the last, enable us to see the seeds of all corruption in a period of health. The lying prophet, the drunken priest, may have been hidden, even may have been externally reformed, in the later golden years of Hezekiah; but the soil out of which they had grown, and which had cherished them, was sure to produce the like weeds afterwards, whenever the diligent culture was withdrawn from it, even if their growth was not fostered and quickened by the hands which should have extirpated them.

We do not hear of any special prophet at this time, Probably there was no one then whose visions were committed to writing, no one, perhaps, whose visions extended beyond the immediate evil and its coming punishment. Mere simple denunciations, such as we heard of among the early seers of Israel, may have supplied the place of the winding discourse and the song that rose from the depths of earth to the heights of heaven. This we should infer from the words in the Book of Kings: "The Lord spake by His servants, the prophets, saying, Because Manasseh, king of Judah, hath done these abominations, and hath done wickedly above all that the Amorites did which were before him, and hath made Judah also to sin with his idols: therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Behold, I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will forsake the remnant of mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, because they have done that which was evil in my sight, and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt even unto this day." — 2 Kings xxi. 10 – 15.

The immediate accomplishment of this prediction is thus recorded in the 2d Book of Chronicles, ch. xxxiii.: "Wherefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters and carried him to Babylon." Babylon, which had revolted from the Assyrian empire, had again become a portion of it. That empire was exhibiting in its latter days all its ancient character. But its former capital was beginning to be threatened by the Medes. Babylon, the old glory of the Chaldees, soon to become the centre of a new Chaldean empire, having recovered from the effects of its siege, was probably the centre of Asiatic religion and civilization. Manasseh would find himself surrounded there by the gods of whom he had set up images in Jerusalem; he would see that in its perfection which he had tried to imitate on a poor and insignificant scale. And he would be under the rod with which he had wished to scourge his subjects. This was the kind of lesson which all the prophets had prepared their kings for. They had dallied with idolatry; there was something in it especially attractive, it seemed so much more passionate, devout, sympathetic, than that worship which the law of their fathers had prescribed. Their taste would be gratified. They should experience this worship in the length and depth and breadth of it. They had dallied with tyranny; what old decrees and statutes had power to bind them, the rulers of the land? what obligations had they to their serfs and bondsmen? No remedy can be effectual for such thoughts, but that which is said to have been tried upon the Sicilian masters in the days of Timoleon, the becoming serfs and bondsmen themselves. In this case, we are told, it was effectual. Manasseh humbled himself, turned to the Lord God of Israel, was brought back to Jerusalem another man. Probably he was able to effect a very partial cure of the evils which he had caused, and of the confusion from which the land must have been suffering during his captivity. The short reign of his son is represented as not less corrupt than the greater part of his own had been; it was ended by conspiracy and assassination. Josiah, a boy of eight years old, was left. There may have been a promise of good in himself from his childhood; but the first years of his reign must have exhibited all the crimes and miseries which had been ripening for more than half a century.

To this period the prophet Zephaniah belongs. In the opening of his book we are told that the word of the Lord came to him in the days of Josiah the son of Amon. We have a right to suppose that they were his earliest days, for this book does not allude to any symptoms of reformation. The sentences with which it commences are all indicative of coming woes and present idolatry. "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumbling-blocks with the wicked. And I will cut off man from off the land, saith the Lord. I will also stretch out my hand on Judah, and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place, and the name of the Chemarims with the priests. And them that worship the host of heaven upon the house-tops, and them that worship and swear by the Lord, and that swear by Malcham, and them that are turned back from the Lord, and them that have not sought the Lord nor have inquired for him." All these different classes of evil-doers, — the prophets, priests, and devotees of the old Phœnician worship; those of the new Sabæan or Babylonian worship; those who had nominally adhered to the worship of Jehovah, but secretly swore by some other name; those that, without any forms of false religion, had become utterly indifferent, heartless, unbelieving, — are warned that a day of the Lord is at hand, a great sacrifice to which He had bidden His guests.

There is a vagueness in the prophet's description of the approaching calamity. But he is vague no longer when he speaks of the evils which the day of the Lord is to bring to light and punish. He is as distinct as any of his predecessors in declaring that it would disturb them "who are settled on their lees," who say, "The Lord will not do good or do evil." He says that "the princes, and the kings' children, and those who were clothed with strange apparel," that is to say, all the proud and luxurious courtiers; — "those that leap on the threshold, and fill their master's houses with violence and deceit," that is to say, the tools of injustice, legal or military, who violated the sanctity of the humble man's dwelling to obtain treasures for their employers; — those who dreamed that their silver and their gold would be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; — all would be guests at this sacrifice; their goods would become a booty and their homes a desolation. Instead of the ordinary cry of the seller, there would be a cry from one gate, and a howling from another, that the enemy was approaching. They would walk like bewildered blind men, "their blood would be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung."

These heaviest threatenings apply to Judah and Jerusalem. But such a day as this would affect them just because it would affect all the nations. In this sense, Zephaniah, like every other prophet, is a leveller. The people of God has to take its lot among the other people. Its sin brings the same punishment as theirs. The only difference is, that its sins are represented as more cardinal, more radical, than those of all others; there is in them more of conscious disobedience; they spring from a more direct resistance to a Will which has revealed itself, has made its righteousness and mercy visible in acts. Zephaniah proceeds to speak of this judgment as one that would make "Gaza forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation, which would drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and root up Ekron, which would bring woe upon the inhabitants of the sea-coast and destroy the land of the Philistines, which would cause Moab to be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, which would slay the Ethiopians with the sword"; finally, "which would destroy Assyria and make Nineveh a desolation." — ii. 4-13.

And yet here the same paradox encounters us which we have met with elsewhere. A vision of blessedness to the chosen race, to the Jews already in captivity as well as to those who might hereafter go into it, seems to come out of this expected ruin. The deserted seacoast "shall be for the remnant of the houses of Judah"; "in the houses of Ashkelon shall they lie down in the evening": "the residue of my people shall possess the land from which Ammonites and Moabites have been cast out." Were such promises to comfort those that were dwelling in the security that they were the blessed of the Lord, and that all others were cursed and hated by Him? No, they were to comfort "the meek of the earth, those who were seeking righteousness and seeking meekness." Those who desire to see righteousness and meekness triumphant over wrong and violence, were to learn that this was the end of all these punishments, that they were to bring down the haughtiness of the Jews as much as Gentiles, to crush them in themselves that they might become faithful witnesses of God. If a remnant of their own tribes would take possession of villages and coasts from which the races about them had been cast out, it would not be till they had shared their misery and been taught to know that their God was not one of those carnal, separate gods whom men set up, but was *the* God who ordered the times before appointed and the bounds of man's habitation, that in every place they might be led to seek him. No sorrow could be too tremendous which fixed the truth in the mind of Israelites, that they were to be a bond of peace to all lands, not at once the imitators and the pattern of their hatreds.

Therefore, when Zephaniah has foretold the cutting off of the nations, the desolation of their towers, the emptying of their cities, he says to Israel, "I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of mine holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the Name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity nor speak lies, neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth." — iii. 11 – 13.

He had already uttered another promise, which Israelites might well claim, but which they could not limit to themselves. "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the Name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent." (iii. 9.) Such an expectation of a universal kingdom the prophet knew must be the most consolatory of all to those who were sorrowful in the solemn assembly, to whom the reproach of Israel was a burden. They would feel that a blessing to all nations was the highest blessing which they could desire themselves, that when it was fulfilled, they should know that "the King of Israel, even the Lord, was in the midst of them, and that He had turned back their captivity from before their eyes."

It is not a new, and certainly it is a very reasonable supposition, that these earnest exhortations of Zephaniah may have been at least one influence in bringing about the great reformation which commenced in the eighteenth year of King Josiah's reign. His name, however, does not occur in the passage of the Book of Kings which describes that reformation. The book of the law of the Lord, it seems, had become a strange and unknown book even to Shaphan the scribe and to Hilkiah the priest. When Hilkiah read it before the king, we are told that "he rent his clothes, and said, 'Inquire of the Lord for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found. For great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened to the words of this book, to do all that is written concerning us.'" The person they consult is not Zephaniah (who may perhaps have gone to his rest), but Huldah the prophetess. She declares that the words of the book of the law would be fulfilled against Judah and Jerusalem; but that the king, whose heart was tender and who had humbled himself, should not see all the evil which should be brought on that place.—2 Kings xxii.

The reformation was searching and vigorous, in proportion to the humiliation and shame which had preceded it. It was grounded upon an acknowledgment of the covenant which the living God had made with the people. All the vessels that had been made for Baal and for the grove, and the chariots of the sun, were burnt with fire; the idolatrous priests were put down, the high places were defiled, the altars which Ahaz and Manasseh had set up were broken in pieces and their dust cast into the brook Kidron; every relic of the Solomon idolatry was extinguished. The images in Samaria and Bethel were treated like those in Jerusalem. The moral abominations which had accompanied these idolatries, and the different forms of devil-worship which had prevailed in all parts of the land, were rooted out so far as it was possible for a king to root them out. Finally, the king commanded all the people, saying, "Keep the Passover unto the Lord your God, as it is written in the book of the covenant." This great pledge of the national unity seems to have been hailed by the people in the distant parts of the land more than it was in Hezekiah's days, when the Samaritans could still cling to their separate king and their private altars. For the historian says, "Surely there was not holden such a Passover, from the days of the judges that judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah."

As Huldah the prophetess declared, the terrible judgment which Zephaniah saw overhanging the land did not come upon it in the days of Josiah. But a calamity was at hand, and the king himself was the author of it. It was the precursor of all those which his repentance had delayed. Like the best of his predecessors, the young king could not resist the vanity of speculating upon the relations of the great powers to each other, and of plunging into foreign wars. While Asia was in tumult, it was not unnatural that Egypt should seem to him his most formidable enemy. He fancied he could resist it. He went out against Pharaoh-Nechoh, and his servants carried him in a chariot, dead, from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own sepulchre.

This was the beginning of a temporary Egyptian ascendency. His son Jehoahaz reigned but three months in Jerusalem. And Pharaoh-Nechoh put him in bonds at Riblah, in the land of Hamath, and he went to Egypt and died there. Zephaniah's predictions were partially fulfilled. Princes and kings were becoming guests at a sacrifice; their goods were becoming a booty, and their houses a desolation. It seemed as if Egypt might be the enslaver of the children, as it had been of the fathers. "For Pharaoh-Nechoh made Eliakim king in room of Jehoahaz his father, and turned his name to Jehoiakim. And Jehoiakim gave the silver and the gold to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the money according to the commandment of Pharaoh; he exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, of every one according to his taxation, to give it unto Pharaoh-Nechoh." — 2 Kings xxiii. 31–35.

But a day of the Lord was at hand for Pharaoh, as well as for the kings of Judah.

"In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years: then he turned and rebelled against him. And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spake by his servants the prophets. Surely at the commandment of the Lord came this upon Judah, to remove them out of his sight, for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did; and also for the innocent blood that he shed (for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood), which the Lord would not pardon." — 2 Kings xxiv. 1–4.

This passage describes, in the first place, the irruption of different inorganic bands of freebooters. The time of it may correspond to the time of that Scythian domination of which Herodotus speaks. In such an anarchy, waifs and relics of the different nations which had been extinguished by the Assyrian Empire would be gathered together. What the Greek historian describes under one vague general name, would present itself to each particular land as a collection of different neighboring tribes, one more conspicuous and civilized than the rest as its leader. Nebuchadnezzar now first presents himself to us as the head and representative of the Chaldean race, as the organizer of these loose bands into a new empire, as the conqueror of Egypt, as the Babylonian ruler of his day.

For the full interpretation of his commission and of the reign of Jehoiakim, we must turn to the prophet Jeremiah. But there is another prophet whose visions seem to refer precisely to this period; who describes the Chaldeans, not as they would appear to one who lived in an earlier time, when they were connected with the older Asiatic civilization, nor yet at a later, when Nebuchadnezzar's empire had been completely consolidated. No date is assigned to the prophecy of Habakkuk in any part of his book; but the following passage has determined eminent critics, apparently with the best reason, to connect it with this crisis of the national history.

"Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously; for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo! I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat. They shall come all for violence; their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand. And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong-hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it. Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god."—i. 5–11.

In the following chapter the picture is somewhat changed. We have still the same clear and living indications of a lawless, reckless race. But along with these, there is the image of a great conqueror, who is coveting an evil covetousness to himself, that he may set his nest on high, and be delivered from the power of evil; of one who is building a town with blood, and establishing a city with iniquity; of one who is making the people to labor in the very fire, and the people to weary for very vanity; of one who is saying to the wood, "Awake," and to the dumb stone, "Arise, and it shall teach, for it is laid over with gold and silver." Such a description would admirably accord with the words of Nebuchadnezzar, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" It would point out the tasks which he was imposing on the people whom he had vanquished, whilst he was establishing himself in his palace, and introducing new images into his temple. Whilst the old Babel kingdom of Assyria was sinking, and prophets were singing of its ruin, Habakkuk from his watch-tower beheld this new Babel kingdom coming forth into the world, its birth fittingly celebrated by the shouts of the Chaldean plunderers, and by the death-groans of their victims.

"O Lord," thus the prophet speaks when this new vision dawns upon him, — "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." — i. 1–4.

Josiah's reformation had taken place between the time of Zephaniah and Habakkuk. There had been pledges and foretastes of a righteous government upon the earth; all, as it seemed, in vain. The good king was hardly taken from the land, before it was given up to ruffians who mocked at law and right, and did whatever was in the power of their hands. The prophet is cast down, but not in despair. He cries out, "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." He knew that that was true: and there was comfort in the knowledge. But a man cannot sustain himself on a maxim or a proposition. He must speak out his doubt and his anguish.

"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? and makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag; therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?"—i. 13-17.

A heathen, and, alas! how many a Christian! would be afraid thus to reason with God concerning His judgments. He would cover his practical unbelief and inward murmuring with the hollow phrases, "No doubt all is for the best"; "It is the will of God and must be right." The Jewish prophet believed in God as a Person, and not as a dark blank fate; and therefore he could boldly say, "I know this is *not* right. O Thou who art altogether right, explain to me the contradictions in Thy universe; tell me why Thou sufferest evil to dwell in it. Let me not have words to solve the dark enigmas of fact, but give me some ground upon which I can stand when all is reeling and shaking around me. And let it be a ground upon which I may rest my hope, not for myself only, but for my race, upon which these oppressors are trampling." The prayer was heard. The words which I have taken for my text give the answer: "His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith." The secret of all Chaldean and Babylonian oppression lies there; the man is lifted up in himself. He thinks he has something of his own upon which he may exalt himself; therefore he treats human beings as if they were creeping things or fishes of the sea. There lies the secret of the life of an Israelite; he shall live by his faith. Feeling and knowing himself to be nothing, he is obliged to cast himself wholly upon God. And any thing which takes away that self-confidence, and any thing which brings forth that faith, is blessed, is divine; let the outward aspects of it be as dark, let the inward anguish which it produces be as terrible, as it may. Here is the solution of the riddles of the universe; here is the key to God's dark and inscrutable ways. Not a solution which we can resort to as if it were a formula of ready application, which may stifle questioning and set our minds at ease. Not a key such as empirics and diviners use, pretending that they know all the wards of every mystery and can open it at their pleasure, but one to which the humble and the meek can always resort when most baffled, when most ignorant, — one which helps them to welcome their own tribulations and to see in the tribulations of the world a sure witness that the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

In this spirit Habakkuk stands and waits. He writes the vision and makes it plain upon tables that he that runneth may read it, that men in after days may know how their forefathers have suffered and sorrowed, and may know where they could not find and where they did find deliverance. He does not see to the end of the vision; he does not ask to see. There is yet an appointed time; to tarry is his task, — yes, and his privilege. For no sudden discovery could give him the simple dependence, the thorough confidence, to which he is trained amidst clouds and darkness. Out of that darkness there rises — not some Atlantis, some island of the blessed, whither men may fly from the misery that is about them. He says, —

"God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power." — iii. 3, 4.

The land in which he dwelt, the mountains on which he had looked from childhood, — these, and not some far-off world, spoke to him of the Divine Presence. God was there. And this God was He who had delivered His people, who cared for the poor and needy, who had declared war against the proud and oppressor. To see the pestilence and the burning coals working as His ministers, the everlasting mountains swallowed at His word, the rivers cleaving the earth, the sun and moon standing still or moving at the light of His arrows, — this was fearful, it made his lips quiver and his hands tremble. Yet the sight gave him rest in the day of trouble. At the root of confusion was eternal order; every dark power in Nature, every human will, must work out the purposes of Eternal Love.

"Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." — iii. 17, 18.

The saddest of all prophecies ends with a song, — the stringed instruments give out a music which is deeper than all the discords and wailings of Creation. Brethren! may it be granted to us with purged ears to hear that music, may it have an echo in our inmost hearts. We shall hear it best, we shall join in it most fervently, when we have confessed how little fruit we have ourselves brought forth to God, when we have mourned over the dryness and barrenness of God's Church. Then, when we have felt how death is written upon all things, we shall begin to know the power of the risen life; we shall understand the truth, — Jesus Christ was crucified in the flesh, that He might be quickened in the Spirit, and that, together with His own body, He might quicken us and the whole universe.

SERMON XXII.

TEMPTATION THE SCHOOL OF THE PROPHET.

LINCOLN'S INN, 4TH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER. — MAY 9, 1852.

Then said I, "Ah! Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child." But the Lord said unto me, "Say not, I am a child; for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces, for I am with thee to deliver thee," saith the Lord. — JEREMIAH i. 6–9.

IT is not improbable that Jeremiah was almost a child when he spoke these words. The earliest of the prophets was called to his office when he was girded with the linen ephod which Hannah had made for him. The king of the land at the time when the word of the Lord first came to Jeremiah was a child, and yet knew that he was destined to do a great work. Josiah had clear evidence that he was designated to his task before his birth; it devolved upon him simply because he was the heir of the house of David. The like assurance came in another way to the young priest of Anathoth. To him it was revealed, "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; before thou camest out of the womb, I sanctified thee and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."

I do not believe it would have been possible for either of them, when he became a man, to have suffered life without this conviction. If the king had thought that he held his power because there were some special virtues in him which entitled him to it, if Jeremiah had fancied that he was a prophet because there was in him a certain aptitude for uttering divine discourses and foreseeing calamities, who can tell the weariness and loathing which each would have felt for his task when it led to no seeming result, except the dislike of all against or for whom it was exercised, — still more when the powers and graces which were supposed to be the qualifications for it became consciously feeble. Nothing but a witness, the more sure for being secret, — "Thou wast marked and sealed for this function before thou hadst done good or evil; all thy powers are endowments to fit thee for fulfilling thy vocation, but do not constitute it; they may perish, the comfort and inward satisfaction in the work may perish, — it may produce nothing but pain to thyself and to those who are brought within thy influence, — or, harder still, it may be regarded with utter indifference and contempt by others till thou almost art taught to despise it thyself: still the words must be spoken; the acts must be done; for they are not thy words or thy acts"; — nothing, I say, but such a persuasion as this, written and rewritten in a man's heart, could sustain him against the conflicts outward and inward which pursue the righteous king and the true prophet.

In proportion, then, as a man had to sustain a more than usual amount of such conflicts, one might suppose that his discipline would begin early, that there would be intimations to him in boyhood, which would assure him afterwards that he had not rushed into his office through some momentary impulse, but that a hand, which he could not shrink from or shake off, had been leading him, drawing him, even dragging him, forwards, when he was most reluctant and would most readily have gone some other way.

This conclusion is strengthened by some evidence in the case of Jeremiah. Considering the time to which he lived, he must have been young in the thirteenth year of Josiah, — young enough to make the most literal sense of the expression in the text a reasonable one. Nevertheless I cannot think that the force of it depends upon that evidence. The feelings which Jeremiah experienced now were those which Moses experienced when he was eighty years old. He who said, "I am not eloquent, neither heretofore nor since Thou hast spoken to me," said in fact, "I am a child, only able to lisp the words that Thou wouldst have me utter in the ears of Pharaoh and of my countrymen; a helpless stranger in an inhospitable world." When Jeremiah was eighty years old, I do not suppose that he would have used these words with a less sense of their truth, than when he first felt the Divine compulsion. All the intermediate time he was only learning more thoroughly how true they were, and how true the answer to them was.

No doubt there was something in the character and temperament of the man, which made this language more natural to him than it was to Moses. The meekness which is attributed to *him* must have been of slow growth, brought out by a long discipline. All his early acts exhibit him to us as fervid and vehement; traces of that disposition appear even in his latest years. Jeremiah has a kind of feminine tenderness and susceptibility; strength was to be educed out of a spirit which was inclined to be timid and shrinking. Think of such a vision as this being presented to a mind cast in that mould: "See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant."

At first we should be disposed to say, "Such words can never have applied, in their strict and literal import, to any seer or teacher. They belong to the warrior and the conqueror. We must explain them by a figure of speech. One who discourses of the fall of kingdoms must be represented as himself the overthrower of them." I do not think that either the analogy of language or the facts of the case justify that method of interpretation. If the prophet only talked of what was happening or what was to happen, no poetical license could permit us to confound him with the subverters of thrones and societies. But have we yet to learn that a great teacher or reformer, though he may never take a sword into his hands, does that which swords cannot do; that swordsmen, in fact, only carry out upon the surface that which he is doing under ground? The uprooting of the thoughts and principles in which acts originate, the planting the seeds of life, which are hereafter to bring forth fruits that all will recognize, are his functions. If he has received any inspiration, any vital power at all, it must be one which enables him to produce a movement at the very heart of human life and society, in a region of which the ordinary statesman knows nothing. We shall find hereafter that Jeremiah did pull down and destroy, and plant and build, and that his countrymen felt and knew that he did. And at the very commencement of his work he has an inward certainty that he must be a man of war. The surrounding world, his own people, his nearest kinsfolk, will regard him as their enemy. A strange anticipation for one whose temptation would have been to purchase their good-will at almost any price; who would have longed to go anywhere that he might avoid strife! Yet so it must be. There is no flight for him into quiet religious contemplation; he cannot persuade himself that he is to prove his difference from his countrymen, and his superiority to them, by withdrawing from the circle of interests in which they are dwelling. He may pass hours or months of solitude, but he will not be away from the events which are befalling them; he will be more deeply occupied by them; he will be contemplating them with a closeness and intensity to which the mere actors in them are strangers. The poor young priest of Anathoth can in no way sever himself from the policy of nations and rulers; Judea, Egypt, Chaldea, every tribe and power of the earth, must be about him in his closet, must enter into his most inward personal experiences and sufferings.

This was the law under which every Jewish prophet lived; but in no case is it so vividly exemplified as in Jeremiah. We are brought into more direct personal intercourse with him than with any one of his order; the sensitiveness of his spirit made him more conscious than sterner natures are of shocks from those with whom he was in contact directly, and even through a number of intermediate hands; the time in which he lived compelled every man to consider what his existence as a Jew meant, and what it had to do with his existence as a man. We shall not, therefore, understand the struggles or aspirations of his individual soul, if we go to the prophecy for the purpose of observing them. He did not think or speak of his soul, but of God. He did not know that he had a soul, except so far as God revealed Himself to him as the Lord God of Israel.

Jeremiah is instructed himself, as he is to instruct others, by signs. The two signs which he tells us of at the commencement of his book presuppose a man full of earnest thoughts and meditations. The sight of a tree tells him that the Lord will hasten His word to perform it. It is not easy to trace the process by which any visible thing suggests to a man a deep conviction, which a long course of experiments is afterwards to establish. Often some slight accident, something in the name or look of the object which any other person would not take notice of, meets with a series of thoughts previously awakened, and leads to a discovery which must have come from another far deeper source. A tree, however, even without such associations, by its orderly growth, by the invisible energy within, foretelling the appearance of the fruits in their appointed season, was perhaps of all symbols the one which would be most likely to remind him of a power as remote from mere sensible observation, as certain to produce sensible effects,— which was working in the acts of men and the changes of the world.

The other image was still more obvious. A seething pot, with its face towards the north, told him that out of the north an evil should break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. We have heard what strange elements were boiling and fermenting in the north; Zephaniah had seen them in a distant vision, but he could not tell whether Egypt might not be the destined successor of Assyria. Habakkuk clearly saw that Chaldea was the appointed scourge. Jeremiah is shown at the very commencement of his work, when the king and his advisers thought the Pharaohs were their chief remaining enemies, that the seething pot had not its face in that direction. This revelation also clearly points to that gathering of bands, that mixture of different races, in the attack upon Palestine, which was described in the passage I quoted last Sunday from the Book of Kings: "Lo, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, and they shall come."

But the issue of the struggle is one which even Habakkuk did not foresee. "They shall set every one his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all the walls thereof round about, and against all the cities of Judah." This was the outward event for which the prophet was to prepare himself and his people. But he was not chiefly to speak of that. The event itself was as much a sign as the almond-tree or the seething pot. It denoted an internal condition of the nation, and a design of Him who was the ruler of it. "I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burnt incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands." We perceive, as much from the words of the prophet as the history, that this idolatry has now become deep and radical. We do not hear chiefly of altars raised to Baal or the Queen of Heaven, but of the result to which these altars have been leading. The state of mind which was latent in them, and which they brought forth into full, conscious activity, is represented as an apostate state; not so much an adoption of false gods as a denial of the true. There is a very great practical difference between the frivolous, heartless taste for foreign novelties, which was denounced by the earlier prophets, and the utter incapacity for acknowledging a god not appealing to the senses which Jeremiah discovers in his contemporaries. He boldly sets up the faith of the heathen as a lesson to the Israelites. "Pass over to the isles of Chittim and see; and send unto Kedar, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods? But my people hath changed their glory for that which doth not profit." He perceives among all the heathen people a tenacity of the traditions they had received from their fathers. They were clinging to names and forms which had no substance in themselves; still, in so far as they were inherited, the affection for them was a confession of permanence, of something which the worshipper did not make for himself. But they to whom the permanent Being had revealed Himself, they whom He had chosen as His witnesses to all nations that He is and that He abides, — they were always seeking to shake off the feeling of His reality as if it were an oppression, and to set up self-chosen symbols in place of Him.

Hosea was taught what the dispersion of the tribes would mean, by the infidelity and revolt of his wife. Jeremiah is taught to understand what is coming upon Judah, by the same terrible analogy.

"Thus saith the Lord: I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thy espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land which was not sown." Amidst all the variations of the discourse which follows, this is evidently the key-note. The thought of a divorce between creatures and their Creator, wilfully effected by the determination of the creatures not to acknowledge their relation to the Creator, by their determination to create gods for themselves, recurs to him continually, and always with fresh astonishment and awe. If the tenderness of his spirit disposed him to dwell upon this kind of illustration, if he grew more feelingly alive to the truth of it as bonds of friendship and kinsmanship were in his own case dissolved, yet there is a fear and amazement lying beneath all his gentler emotions, and making language, which would be more pathetic than that of any of his predecessors, at times more stern and terrible.

The reason, I believe, is one from which we may draw great consolation. The discoveries and revelations to the minds of the prophets became deeper, in proportion as they approached nearer to some great crisis in their country's history. It was possible for the Israelite of an earlier time, even for the instructed Israelite, to think of the covenant which God had made with His people as an act of grace, expressing, no doubt, the mind of a gracious Being, but still as almost arbitrary. We have seen how Isaiah was gradually educated to know that the covenant denoted a real and eternal relation between God and man, in the person of a Mediator. If that truth is not brought out with the same force and distinctness in Jeremiah, if he is not in the same sense as the other, the evangelical prophet, yet he had even a deeper conviction that a Divine Spirit was with him continually, a Spirit which was seeking to subdue his will and all wills to itself. That men should break loose from this gracious government, should choose to be independent of it, seemed to him the saddest and strangest thing in the world. It was not the casting off of an outward legal yoke; it was the refusing to be under a sceptre of Love; it was a fight in the innermost sanctuary of man's being against Good and for Evil; a determination that not God, but the opposite of God, the enemy of God, should have the homage of the heart and reins. And yet, at the same time, he was learning from his own experience how natural it was for the spirit of man to engage in this strife. How often was he conscious of it in himself! How often the thraldom of Love was galling to him! How ready was he at one moment to disbelieve in the very existence of the power, which at another presented itself to him with an overwhelming evidence, humbled him, elevated him, made him able to teach or to defy the people of the earth!

Suppose he could have thought, as religious men often think in our day, that these inward battles were confined to him and a few rare and select persons, and that it was altogether an absurdity and a profaneness to speak of them as having any connection with the wild, ungodly people about him, he would never have poured out his lamentations over Jerusalem, or been a prophet to the nations. But the only singularity which he could claim was this, that he was taught to observe in himself what was going on in other men who did not observe it. He dares not say that the Spirit which was speaking to him, demanding his submission, offering him the promise and blessings of obedience, was not striving also with his countrymen. The message to them was this: —

"Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the Lord; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion: and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."

These words, you perceive, are addressed to the North. They affirm that a mysterious bond, which no sin of theirs had been able to break, united even those tribes which were gone into captivity to the God of Abraham; that He was still holding intercourse with them, and seeking to bring their hearts back to himself. All religious people have felt that the bond of which

Jeremiah speaks cannot be an outward or a formal one; that his words denote the most inward spiritual relationship. Their inference is, that Israel cannot mean Israel, that it must mean believing men. They are so convinced that a relationship cannot exist between God and those who are not confessing it, that they will practise any outrage upon the inspired utterances of prophets and apostles, rather than permit them to proclaim what, according to this theory, is a flagrant contradiction. But we must violate more than the letter of Jeremiah's prophecy, if we hold it to be a contradiction. All his most bitter and painful inward experiences were teaching him, that if he only trusted in God because he was a faithful man, he could not really trust in Him at all. The deceitfulness of other men's hearts became known to him through the deceitfulness of his own. His unwillingness to speak any more words in God's name, enabled him to understand the rebellion of his countrymen. He needed to have the precious and the vile separated in himself, that he might teach all Israelites how the good seed in them might be made victorious over their evil nature, when they acknowledged that the one was all of God, the other all their own. He had to be delivered from his own false confidences again and again, before he could teach the rich man not to glory in his riches, or the wise man in his wisdom, but all to glory in knowing Him who executed righteousness and truth in the earth.

The first chapter of Jeremiah, like that of Isaiah, is an introduction to the book. The next five, to the beginning of the seventh, may belong to his life before he left Anathoth; the discourse with which the seventh opens was preached, he says, at the gate of the Lord's house in Jerusalem. As we advance further, the book becomes more obviously and directly mixed with historical details. The first of these portions we may reasonably refer to the five years between the thirteenth and the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, before his reformation had begun. There is no hint of any improvement. The prophet sought in vain for a man in Jerusalem who executed judgment and desired the truth. The poor men and the great men had equally broken the yoke and cast aside the bonds. None would stand in the old ways and ask for the old paths. Such a description answers well to the time when the Book of the Law was a treasure unknown to priests, scribes, and king. But the utter hollowness which the prophet lays bare, the deep-seated inward corruption,— above all, the utter vanity of the priests and prophets,— he could not expect to see cured by any outward return to the services of the temple, any formal reverence for the Book of the Law. "Circumcise your hearts," is the cry of Jeremiah. If that cry was not heeded, the prophets might promise them peace; they might turn to Assyria or to Egypt to save them, but all would be in vain; the wound of the Daughter of Zion could not be healed by empty words or by foreign medicines.

However, therefore, Jeremiah may have sympathized with the zeal and nobleness of the king, (and he speaks of him after his death with affectionate reverence,) it does not seem that he hoped much from his reform, or that he had any commission to encourage him in it, further than as all right and brave words must encourage all right and brave acts. Some of the incidental consequences of that reform,—or, it would be more correct to say, the necessary consequences of the previous state of the people's mind when Josiah had ruffled its surface without disturbing its depths,—Jeremiah was called to denounce. Perhaps not in the days of Josiah, but in those of his successors, he was sent to preach at the temple door against those whose new-found zeal was making the sacredness of the temple a plea for formalism and self-righteous security. We shall find, also, that the reverence for the Book of the Law, which the young king had promoted, was leading to self-conceit, and the fancy that the book had some charm and power of its own, apart from the living wisdom which was in it.

"How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?"

But the greatest cause of dismay to Jeremiah both before and after this external change was the falsehood of the priests and prophets. He did not grow up in Jerusalem within sight of the temple; in a country district, he was likely to feel with greater liveliness than in a city all the impressions and associations which belonged to a member of the Levitical tribe. Are we to suppose that when he became a man he threw these influences and associations aside, forgot that he was a priest, strove to regard himself merely as one of the people, every one of whom was holy? Had he done so, he would have found a number to sympathize with him, whose consciences had been revolted by the inconsistencies and corruptions of the priests, or who were impatient of the restraints which their existence seemed to prescribe. Jeremiah was not to find any such disciples. He thought more of the sacredness of the order than the other members of it; it was because their position seemed to him so very awful and responsible, that he provoked their rage by telling them how they forgot the covenant of the Lord, how little they believed that He was in the midst of them. It was their unbelief, not their belief, which he complained of, their low estimate of their calling, not their exaggeration of it. No doubt he believed that the deepest sympathy with the sorrows and sins of the people, the humblest judgment of themselves, was demanded of those who offered sacrifices for the sins of the people, who were compassed about with their infirmities. No doubt the official or personal self-conceit which arose from their forgetfulness of their relation to the people at large, was one of their greatest offences in his eyes. But these sins arose from their not confessing that they were called by the Lord to be witnesses of His sympathy: whenever they were not witnesses for Him, they were necessarily proud and self-seeking. Jeremiah therefore could only be qualified for this part of his work, or for any other part of it, by feeling in himself every one of those evil tendencies which he imputed to the priests generally. He had to feel all the peculiar temptations of his tribe and class to vanity, self-glorification, self-indulgence, — to feel how quickly they might fall into all the commonest, grossest habits of other men, while there is also a subtle, radical, internal wickedness, — the secret source of the overt acts which the law takes notice of, — that is nearer to them than to those whose offerings they present. Fearful discovery! the man to whom it is made must see the abyss of evil at times closer to his own feet than it can be to those who live more on the outside of things, and have never been taught to look at their properties and principles.

The false prophet was even a more fearful spectacle to Jeremiah than the godless priest. We have seen how Micah trembled at the mysterious evil and the mysterious power of this class of deceivers, who were trafficking with the word of the Lord; speaking a lie, and saying, He hath said it. That was terrible; but to see that the Spirit of God Himself was with them, and in them; that they were bidding *Him* depart from them; that they were giving themselves up to an Evil Spirit with a kind of reckless unbelief, of half-serious atheism, — this was a darker vision; it was the one which rose up full upon the mind of Jeremiah, and which made him look upon the false prophet as at once the type of the depravity of his nation and the mightiest instrument in cultivating it and hastening on the desolation which would be the consequence of it. Yet here again it was a prophet, and only a prophet, who could have entered into the sin of the prophets. If he had not believed in an actual divine teaching and commission and inspiration, in a power mightier than all external power whatever, he could not have perceived what this prostitution of it signified; if he had not been himself in danger every hour of prostituting it himself to his own purposes, and had not been certain that only God Himself could preserve him from that peril, he might have raved at the mischiefs which the false seers wrought in the land; he could never have followed their mischiefs up to their source.

Brethren, I may speak to you hereafter of Jeremiah as the teacher of Israel in the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Let me speak of him to day as a teacher of us, the English priests, and prophets, and people, in the reign of Queen Victoria. Or, if there are some thoughts rising out of this subject, too sacred and awful to dwell upon in any public assembly, then let me beseech you to desire for your own sakes, and for ours, that we may think of them when we are not discoursing to others, but are alone with our own hearts and with God. Let me call upon you very solemnly not to regard the follies and sins which you discover continually in those who minister to you as light things, which you may make a jest of; which you may dwell upon, as proofs that those who are bound by holy professions are not better than others; which you may exult in because they cause any evils or falsehoods of yours to look less black. Be assured that, if we are trivial, the whole land becomes infected with triviality; if we are insincere in our dealings with God, that insincerity will be reproduced in all the ordinary relations of life. If the priest draws nigh to the altar with an unbelieving heart, you will find the statesman base and treacherous in the council-chamber and the senate; if the prophet or preacher speaks words in God's name merely to please or injure men, the clerk and the shopkeeper will be fraudulent likewise. Is there a danger that we shall play with the most dreadful words as if they were counters, shall use the names of Heaven and Hell, and of God Himself, as if they were instruments of our trade? Is there a danger that there shall be nothing answering in our acts to our words, that we shall be more grovelling than ordinary men in the one, in proportion as we are more magnificent in the other? An infinite danger, a danger to be averted by no contrivances, not by flying from the world that we may be above it, not by mixing with it lest we shall be puffed up with spiritual pride. God only knows which course is the safer or the more perilous; in general it seems wiser to take that which the tradition of our country suggests, because it implies least of self-will and self-dependence. But either way we shall be tempted to vanity, servility, untruth. O, if you have ever learnt any truth, or received any nobler impulse from any of us; or if, wanting that personal motive, you care for the well-being of your country, — ask of Him who has promised to hear, that He will give us firmer wills, more childlike hearts, greater boldness in denouncing evil because it is hateful to God and destructive of men, greater tenderness for the evils of others because we feel them bitterly in ourselves. Ask that our lips may be silent if we cannot speak words of health, and that we may not call upon you to make sacrifices, if we are not willing to offer ourselves as sacrifices in His name who is the High-priest of the whole family in heaven and earth.

SERMON XXIII.

THE POTTER'S WORK.

LINCOLN'S INN, SUNDAY AFTER ASCENSION. — MAY 23, 1852.

> The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there will I cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hands of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. — JEREMIAH xviii. 1 – 6.

I HAVE spoken of the two signs by which Jeremiah was instructed in the gradual and certain fulfilment of God's purposes, and in the woe which was coming upon His people from the North. There are other signs scattered through the book, some merely addressed to the prophet himself, some which he was to show to the people or to make use of as parables for their instruction. A girdle which he hid in the hole of a rock till it was marred and profitable for nothing, taught him how close and intimate had been the bond between God and His people; and how, through their own act, all fellowship between Him and them had been destroyed.

In each of these cases — in the last especially — much pains are taken to impress the force of the sign upon the prophet's mind. He must actually wear the girdle; he must take a journey to the Euphrates to hide it. He is not allowed to think of it as a fancy which has struck him and which he may let go or exchange for some other. He must exhaust the full meaning of it before he has done with it. The study of it must be a serious occupation, suspended perhaps for a time, but to be taken up again; the first thought suggested being part of a chain to which the last is linked. I apprehend this was a very wonderful education of a man's spirit, one which may supply very precious hints to ourselves for the discipline of our own. What we want in every occupation is some means of preserving the continuity of our thoughts, some resistance to the influences which are continually distracting and dissipating them. But it is especially the student of the events of his own time, of the laws which regulate them, of the issues which are to proceed from them, who has need to be reminded that he is not studying a number of loose, unconnected phenomena, but is tracing a principle under different aspects and through different manifestations. A sensible illustration, if we would condescend to avail ourselves of it, would often save us from much vagueness and unreality, as well as from hasty and unsatisfactory conclusions.

Jeremiah's studies in the potter's house were commenced like those of which I have spoken, deliberately. He felt that he was commanded to go down to it. He was to consider the whole course of the potter's work as one which contained a meaning that he could not dispense with. If not as unsightly an image as the marred girdle, it had at least nothing picturesque to recommend it. An orator would never choose such an instance for the purpose of making an impression on his audience; still less for the purpose of exhibiting his own skill and liveliness. It must be for business, not for amusement, that such a process is observed. Let us consider what Jeremiah's business was, and how the potter might help him in understanding and performing it.

Josiah had been as thorough a reformer as it was possible for a king to be. The prophet, it would seem, remained silent while he was carrying on his work; speech was not needed when there was such vigorous and consistent action. It might have been expected that when the task was completed he would again open his lips in a song of triumph upon its success. But there were prophets enough to perform that service. Those who had followed Manasseh in raising altars to Baal and the Queen of Heaven, learned with great rapidity to talk of the Temple of the Lord, when Josiah had restored it to be the centre of worship; to boast that they had a perfect law, when it was brought out of its obscurity and when the king trembled as he heard the words of it. It was wonderful to hear how these converts caught the tones and phrases of the old prophets now that they were the favorites of the court again; how they could utter their "burden" just as Hosea or Isaiah had uttered his. But the tones and the phrases were all which could be copied. The actual burden of the old seer was a warning of ruin which the sins of the land must bring forth; the burden of the new seer was Peace, Peace. The king had restored faith; the land had been reformed; what had they to do but rejoice that such blessings had been vouchsafed, and to expect all the further blessings which were promised to a faithful and righteous nation?

Now began the special work of Jeremiah, that one which was to draw upon him such hatred from all among whom he dwelt, and which was to cause him a secret anguish of which they knew nothing. He had to say boldly, Your faith has *not* been restored; your land is *not* reformed; you have no right to expect the blessings of a faithful nation; for your nation is not faithful: you must look for destruction; you have brought it and are bringing it on yourselves. So much he might perhaps have said and have been pardoned. General charges against a nation are borne without much indignation. They may not be believed, they may be thought troublesome and the utterances of a gloomy temper. But they can be easily evaded. They may even impart a certain pleasure to a certain class, and be made reasons for self-congratulation. "No doubt what you say is sadly true about the mass of our countrymen; we, the religious men, the prophets and the priests, feel it; but what can we do?" How comfortable when we can thus sever ourselves from the sins of the world around, and make them a foil to show off our own excellence! It was just this unction which the prophets had administered to their own souls and to the souls of their admiring hearers. It was just this which Jeremiah was to take from them. It is against you, he said, the bright exceptions, you, the religious men, the priests, the prophets, that I am to testify. You are making the land corrupt; you are doing more than all others to hasten its captivity. For whence come the outward acts of unrighteousness, but from the unrighteous heart and will? And what is an unrighteous heart or will, but a heart or will which has severed itself from a Righteous Being and is making another object of worship for itself? Upon them he charges the adulteries, robberies, perjuries, of the land; upon them, all the open idolatries in groves and high places which the people had practised before Josiah's purification, and into which they would assuredly relapse the moment the external restraint was removed. The distinction, therefore, which seemed to exist between the different classes of Israelites was sternly broken down by the prophet; or rather, another distinction was set up instead of it. The great moral offenders were declared to be those who exalted themselves into moral teachers, who boasted of spiritual illumination.

But was not Jeremiah in the like danger? What right had he to separate himself from other prophets, if their sin consisted so especially in the effort which they made to separate themselves from other men? You must read and meditate on his book to hear how great his danger was, and how he was delivered from it. You will find him recording very strange experiences indeed, and uttering very strange words. You will sometimes exclaim, "If I had not met with that expression in the Bible, if it had not been attributed to a great prophet, I should have called it wild, almost blasphemous." You will find him calling the Lord of All to witness, "I have not hastened from being a pastor to follow Thee; neither have I desired the woful day; Thou knowest: that which came out of my lips was right before Thee. Be not a terror unto me: Thou art my hope in the day of evil." He had said before, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." "I sat alone because of Thy hand, for Thou hast filled me with indignation. Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable which refuseth to be healed? Wilt Thou be unto me altogether as a liar and as waters that fail?" These last words do not occur only in one place. "O Lord," he says, "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived." And again: "Righteous art Thou, O Lord, when I plead with Thee. Yet let me talk with Thee of Thy judgments. Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root; they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit." Brethren, it was this boldness of the prophet, — this divine boldness, — in laying bare the actual thoughts of his heart, the confusions by which it was tormented, that kept him true, that made him unlike the men whom he denounced and who denounced him. He looked the facts of the world in the face. He could not interpret them. No man could interpret them to him. He looked at that which was going on in himself. There the same puzzles repeated themselves; nay, were not the puzzles of the outward world rather the echoes and repetitions of those which he discovered within? Must not the explanation of these begin there? Must he not ask the ruler of the inner world to set that right; to purge the eye which was to behold and judge that which was passing around him? Was not this the beginning of reformation?

Do I mean that Jeremiah was taught in this way the doctrine which we hear often announced so oracularly, — "You must reform yourself before you try to reform the world"? No, brethren. I believe, on the contrary, that Jeremiah was taught in this way that he could reform himself just as little as he could reform the world. I believe he was taught that his evils were the evils of the world, and that both needed the same kind of reformation, which must be carried on by the same Person, in the same method. I believe he was taught that the reformation which his individual soul demanded was one which could not be effectual for it, if it were not available for his nation and mankind. And this was the lesson which would answer the questionings that God had awakened in his heart; the one which he was to gain from the potter's house.

"Behold, he wrought a work on the wheels." These wheels, it is said, were two circular stones placed one upon another; the lower fixed, the upper turning on an axis, and moved by the feet of the workman. The nature of the machine, however, does not engage the prophet's principal attention. He sees a man engaged in a task to which he is devoting all his thoughts. He designs to make some clay into a vessel of a certain shape; the form or pattern is present to his mind; he is fully resolved that the material with which he is working shall come forth in that form, and no other. But apparently it disappoints him. One piece of clay after another is marred in his hands; it takes a shape different from that which he would give it; he has to break his vessel again and again; he goes on perseveringly till he has done the thing which he intended to do. "He made it again another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make it." As Jeremiah pores over the sight, the word of the Lord comes to him, "'O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter?' saith the Lord. 'Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.'" Commentators have no doubt what this must signify. The potter could do what he liked with the clay; he could destroy it if he pleased. So, it is said, God can destroy the Israelitish nation, or any nation, when and how he pleases. Very well. But when Jeremiah was sent to study the potter's work, he was sent to ascertain, not what the potter might do *if* he liked, but *what* he liked. He desired to make a vessel of a certain form. That was the end for which he labored. If there is any force or worth in the analogy at all, it must mean that there is a form according to which God is seeking to mould men and nations. It must imply that He is not doing any single act arbitrarily, or without reference to a purpose; it must imply that he is patiently, continually working for the accomplishment of this purpose. All such language would be absurd, incredible, contradictory, if we started with the assumption of a dry Omnipotence, which is merely uttering decrees respecting human beings as to their condition now or hereafter. It is perfectly consistent with itself and with the whole tenor of Scripture, because here and everywhere men are assumed to have wills, upon which no mere blind mechanical power *can* operate, but upon which God, a living Person, is operating by gracious, mysterious, orderly processes, that He may make them in His own likeness. And if they do not submit to this process, if they persist in not taking the mould which he would give them, then the clay is broken that it may be reformed, that the original intent of the owner of the clay may still be carried out.

Here, then, was the mystery of a people's repentance. If they acknowledged this Will which was working upon them, if at any time they yielded to it and desired to be formed by it, this was that conversion and inward change which He was seeking to produce; this was the commencement of that true and radical reformation which would certainly affect in due time the whole surface of life and of society. "At what instant," so Jeremiah applies the image, "I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it;—if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Marvellous! that persons should see in this symbol nothing but an assertion of the sovereignty of God, of His right to do what He likes with His creatures; while the whole course of the prophet's thought under the Divine teaching has been to lead him to think of the order of God's proceedings with men, the methods which He uses to bring them to a knowledge of Him and submission to Him, the fulfilment of His design, when, and only when, He has produced this voluntary obedience.

But there are two points in the prophet's application of the sign which especially require to be noticed. The first is, that he looks upon this symbol as teaching him the principle of God's government of a *people.* We might say, "All this is very true, no doubt, about an *individual;* God tries these processes certainly to bring this and that man out of darkness into light, to awaken in him the thought of his evil, to make him conscious of a deliverer. But what has it to do with a nation? That is an outward body, a formal corporation, of which no spiritual emotions can be predicated, which it is absurd in any wise to connect with them." Most absurd, undoubtedly, if that is the meaning and definition of a nation, which we have chosen to invent when we depart from all the representations of Scripture respecting it, from all that the conscience of men, when it is most alive, testifies their own nation to be. But the time is come — let us say it boldly — when the Bible must be thrown either into the fire as an old worn-out document, or when a nation must be felt to be *not* a formal corporation, but a spiritual reality, a society of which we *can* predicate spiritual conditions and spiritual emotions, which can repent and can be reformed as truly as an individual can. Nay, I apprehend that we shall learn some day that the call to individual repentance, and the promise of individual reformation, has been feeble at one time, productive of turbulent, violent, transitory effects at another, because it has not been part of a call to national repentance, because it has not been connected with a promise of national reformation. We may appeal to men by the terrors of a future state; we may use all the machinery of revivalists to awaken them to a concern for their souls; we may produce in that way a class of religious men who pursue an object which other men do not pursue (scarcely a less selfish, often not a less outward object), — who leave the world to take its own course, — who, when they mingle in it, as in time they must do for the sake of business and gain, adopt again its own maxims, and become less righteous than other men in common affairs, because they consider religion too fine a thing to be brought from the clouds to the earth, while yet they do not recognize a lower principle as binding on them. But we must speak again the ancient language that God has made a covenant with the nation, and that all citizens are subjects of an unseen and righteous King, if we would have a hearty, inward repentance, which will really bring us back to God; which will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and of the children to the fathers; which will go down to the roots of our life, changing it from a self-seeking life into a life of humility and love and cheerful obedience; which will bear fruit upwards, giving nobleness to our policy and literature and art, to the daily routine of what we shall no more dare to call our *secular* existence.

You may think that at all events I have been betrayed into a deviation from the strict language of the text, when I have given it this modern application. Jeremiah, you will say, when he spoke of a nation, meant the *chosen* nation. He begins with an appeal to the house of Israel. Assuredly he does. I am most anxious to remember it, and that his intention was expressly to prepare his countrymen for a change, which would very speedily take place in their own condition. But the second point to which I alluded as so important in this passage was, that Jeremiah could not bring the image of the potter's work to bear with its proper force upon Israelites at that moment, if he confined the purpose of God within the limits which they had fixed for it. He says, "At what instant I shall speak concerning *a* nation, and concerning *a* kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; — if *that* nation turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil which I thought to do them." We do not want the instance of Nineveh, which we considered in a former lecture, or the language of Amos respecting Moab and Ammon, to know how literally any honest Israelite must have interpreted this sentence. For Jeremiah goes on, "And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation and a kingdom, to build and to plant it; — if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them." Here is that levelling tone which we have traced through all the prophets; which never becomes so emphatical as when they are insisting upon the worth of the Divine covenant with the children of Abraham, and are calling upon them to confess it. The prophets uniformly take Israel and its polity as a sample of God's dealing with His creatures, as a witness to them all of what He is, and what He is doing with and for the children of men. This was their high calling; it was their privilege and their glory to proclaim, by their words, their acts, their very existence, the God who executes righteousness and judgment *in the earth*. It was because they did not understand this privilege and glory; — because, at one moment, they made themselves like the people round about, stooping to all their grovelling, dividing idolatries, — at the next, set up themselves as if they were unlike all other people, and might despise them, — in both cases equally denying their covenant, and Him who had made it with them; — that Jeremiah wept in secret places over their pride, that he wished his head were waters, and his eyes a fountain of tears. And when the whole truth flashed upon him, as he gazed on the potter, and saw how one piece of clay after another was marred, and yet how the thing he designed was at last done, it came with an awful vision of what was preparing for his land, with a bright vision of what must ultimately follow from every judgment. The clay was broken; it was not the fitness of that particular lump to receive the shape intended for it which determined or frustrated the will of the artist. That which seemed now compact, and yet which consisted of elements that were always ready to separate from each other, might split into fragments; but the vessel must be made; — not after some different type, but after the original and perfect type which dwelt, not in the dead matter, but in the living mind of Him who was shaping it. A particular race might be cast aside, not wilfully, not in rage, but after a series of gracious, merciful experiments had been made upon it, after it had resolutely refused to be that which it was meant to be, and to do that which it was meant to do. In every case the cause of ruin would be, not some weakness or flaw in the constitution of this race, not some adverse circumstances, but pride; a determination to exist for itself and by itself; a determination issuing in a moral incapacity for understanding the grace of its Ruler, for exhibiting any qualities but those which are most opposed to His grace, most hateful and destructive. And so the Divine righteousness would be vindicated; for never could one of these races be dashed in pieces by the Divine decree till all the life that was in it had departed, till all its substance had been preserved and reclaimed for some future and higher use, till its existence was felt to be a curse and a plague to the nations, till its fall would call forth the shouts and pæans of sufferers, proclaiming, "There is surely a God that judgeth the earth." Thus the destruction, which Jeremiah had foreseen to be approaching his land, justified itself to his conscience and heart. He shrunk from it through the tenderness of his nature, through the patriotism which had become keener and intenser with every woe he had been obliged to pronounce upon his country, with every insult he had endured from it. But beneath all these feelings there lay an inward satisfaction in the triumph of that which was right and true; in the certainty that the Divine type and form of Humanity would be brought forth and exhibited in some way or other through human clay, — in some way or other through his own race, however the members of it might try to resist the process, however one generation or another might have to be broken that the end might be accomplished.

I have dwelt on this particular passage, not only for its own sake, but because I can find none which throws so much light upon the whole prophecy and upon the mind of the prophet. What reformation is *not*, he had learnt too painfully by what he had seen in Jerusalem, and in the whole land. The sweeping away of abuses and abominations only revealed the inward corruption which had produced them. The further he looked into the state of his people, the deeper that corruption appeared. The springs of it were in the very fountains whence life and healing ought to have issued. What a bewildering discovery! And this in the chosen land; this in the land which was to declare the name of God to all lands! And yet he has not reached the most terrible depth of all. In himself — the witness and protestant against the evils which he saw in people, prophets, and priests — they were all gathered up. Within him lay the anger, bitterness, turbulence, pride, which were spreading curses in every family, which were making the houses of Israel a desolation. Were those evils less in him than in those in whom they broke out into open excesses? Had he not rather to meet them in their first essence, in their inmost malignity? But what were they in him or in others? The strife of the clay with the Potter; the struggles of men against a Divine Artificer, not to be brought into their true, reasonable, healthy condition; not to be at peace with each other by being at peace with Him who had made them to bear a common image, to be partakers of a common life. And here was the power which could reform individuals and reform society. Captivity, destruction, was itself a method of reformation; God could bring life out of death, even as man was bringing death out of life. This marring of the clay was a fearful sight; the patience, long-suffering, final victory of the Potter, a glorious one.

And, brethren, if we would meditate on the past, the present, or the future, — if the study of all these is not to be an arid, heartless, distant speculation, or else one which drives us mad, — we must read them by this light; we must be willing to go down to the potter's house and consider what it has to tell us. O, how easily some persons can talk about the course of the world, the disappearance of races, the downfall of empires, as if they were only busy with a geological record, as if human history were a series of formations! How pleasant it is to have "ideas," as people call them, about these changes and developments! And after all, they were beings of our own race who were the subjects of them; the successive strata were men and women who suffered, rejoiced, feared, hoped, had their aspirations after all good and temptations to all evil, as we have. And the relations in which they stood to each other, as members of families and communities, were interwoven with all their personal thoughts and desires; the last became utterly dead or utterly miserable — the thoughts of a prison-house or the dreams of delirium — when they ceased to be conscious of the first. What does it all mean? Are these chance scenes from a drama in which there is no unity, no centre, no catastrophe. Take this simple image with you, and see if the one thought of a living and righteous Being — working amidst the changes of times, working upon human wills for a loving and gracious purpose, working for a purpose which has been realized — does not give you a power of understanding facts which you were content to leave unexplained, does not enable you to bear your ignorance of those which you cannot explain. I do not say that it will be so if you are not convinced that the perfect ideal of Humanity has been brought forth; that a Man, who perfectly submitted that the clay which He bore should be moulded according to the will of an Almighty Father, is the centre of Human Life, Society, History. But I am sure, if that faith is fully received into your hearts that the weary maze will become a blessed order, and that you will think of the condition of your race and of its members with a sympathy and a hope which no theories of perfectibility can impart, which only the God of Sympathy and Hope and Consolation can bestow.

But, brethren, to bear the days in which they live is harder for most, than to consider the days that are gone. The actual sins and miseries by which a land is vexed should be more to us than all which we hear of by distant report. Whether greater or less, they are those with which we are concerned; they are the beams in our eyes which must make our discernment of the motes in the eyes of others uncertain and hazardous. Yet so many are disposed to dwell on the last, and forget the first, to pour forth felicitations on our blessed freedom from corruptions and idolatries or forms of unbelief which afflict neighboring lands, that other men, experiencing how great our idolatry is, how deep our unbelief, are easily tempted to think we might advantageously change conditions with almost any of those whom we have been used to fly from or despise. There are some, who, being at the furthest remove from this opinion, yet feeling how much we need reformation, hope that it may come through the acts of civil rulers. There are some, who, scorning all such help, would cry out, that powers, now withheld from the priests and prophets of the land for removing their own grievances, should with all speed be restored to them. Brethren, we may take up with any of these conclusions, we may exchange one for another very frequently, we may at last acquiesce in the opinion that the Church in this land, perhaps in all lands, is destined to perish by slow decay or sudden violence, till we learn to feel how deeply rooted the evil is, how closely it touches the vitals of society, how near it is to ourselves. Then we shall give over hoping any thing from assimilations to foreigners, we shall think that, even when the original in its own region is innocent and laudable, the copy is likely to be insincere and unnatural; that in general, when we set out with a purpose of imitating, we shall choose what is worse in the practices of others and omit what is best; that the hankering after novelties is the sign of a disease within, which the obtaining of them certainly would not cure. Then we shall say, "The rough work which civil rulers can do in cutting up weeds may be inevitable; but it will be done blindly and ignorantly, it will probably destroy as much of wheat as of tares, it will certainly not destroy any of the corruptions in the soil which cause the tares to spring up and the wheat to perish." Then we shall say, "We churchmen shall have power enough when we know how to use it. But may God give us reformation first; legislative functions, if we require them, afterwards. May He leave us not to the miserable delusion that we can set other men right by any processes which shall not strike first at their sins in ourselves, or that these can be reached till we submit them to God's discipline, till we believe that it is His will to set us and all men right, if we do not fancy that we can be right without Him."

And so we are brought back in this case also to the potter's house. But we must learn there that other fearful lesson which Jeremiah learnt, and which is as true for us as it was for the house of Israel. If God's promise, that his Son's kingdom shall have no end, means that all the races which He has invited to become portions of that kingdom shall always continue to be portions of it, how should Jerusalem, Constantinople, Alexandria, have fallen under the power of the Crescent? Are not these cities proofs that the clay is marred in the new, as it was in the old time, when it resists the will of the Artificer? Why should Romanists or Protestants think that the law will be violated in their case? What is there in the clay of Italy, Germany, France, England, to give it a special exemption from the sentence upon that which is profitable for nothing? Let us not be high-minded, but fear. It is written, "If he spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee." But it is written also, that "the casting away of them was the riches of the world." It is written, further, that "all Israel shall be saved." Even after the clay in human eyes has been utterly marred, we know that the Potter still looks after it, still seeks to bring the true form out of it. No one word of His can fall to the ground. Surely these words cannot, which are sealed with the blood of the Son of God: "He willeth that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

We know that, whatever happens to one generation or another, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established above the hills, and that all nations shall flow unto it. We know that the regenerating spirit of Him who has ascended on high, that He might fill all things, shall cast out all evil spirits, and shall claim human clay and all natural things for Himself. We know that God has said, He will write upon human hearts His own name, and the name of the new Jerusalem, His holy city. And since the glory of the universe implies the blessedness of the individuals who compose it, since our belief in the immortality of God's kingdom does not interfere with the belief in a personal immortality, but sustains and ratifies it, we are sure that the vision in the potter's house will be fulfilled in another very literal and blessed manner. He who has given each of us a tenement of clay may subject it to much hard discipline, may suffer it at last to be quite marred and to return to its kindred earth again. "But if the Spirit of Him who raised up Christ from the dead dwell in us, He will also quicken our mortal bodies." Only that which hinders the shining forth of the spiritual beauty in the human form will perish. The body of humiliation will be made like to Christ's glorious body, by that power whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself.

SERMON XXIV.

THE NEW COVENANT.

Lincoln's Inn, Whitsunday. — May 30, 1852.

> Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was a husband to them, saith the Lord; but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. — Jeremiah xxxi. 31 – 34.

The later chapters of Jeremiah, which do not follow each other in chronological order, and in which there are many repetitions, connect his personal history with the reigns of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, and with the anarchy which followed the murder of Nebuchadnezzar's officer, Gedaliah.

The following passage from the twenty-second chapter refers to Josiah and his three successors. "Weep ye not for the dead," says the prophet, "neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more, nor see his native country." He who was not to return is called in the next verse Shallum, but it seems clear that he is the Jehoahaz of the Book of Kings, and that the place to which he was led captive, and where he was to die, was the capital of Pharaoh. The following passage, beginning at the thirteenth verse, refers to Jehoiakim. He is contrasted with his father, "who judged the cause of the poor and needy," and so proved that he knew the Lord: — whereas the son "was building his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong: — he was using his neighbor's services without wages, and giving him not for his work: — he was ceiling his house with cedar, and painting it with vermilion: — his eyes and his heart were not but for his covetousness, and for to shed innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it." He was imitating, it would appear, the tastes and habits of the monarch by whose favor he reigned. The taxes, which he was obliged to levy upon his people for the service of the foreigner, were made more intolerable by his own self-indulgence and luxury. There was in him that stupid security which may so often be seen in men who have already suffered the deepest disgraces, and who are on the edge of utter downfall. Therefore he is told that "they shall not lament for him, saying, 'Ah my brother!' or, 'Ah lord!' or, 'Ah his glory!' that he shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn forth and cast beyond the gates of Jerusalem." The more terrible judgment which is to follow upon the young king and the queen-mother, as well as the whole land, is announced in the following verses. "As I live, saith the Lord, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence. And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die."

In Jeremiah's time, as in the time of the earlier prophets, the judgment upon Judea was really a judgment upon all the nations. Egypt, the land of the Philistines, the kings of Tyrus, the kings of Sidon, the kings of Arabia, the kings of the mingled people that dwelt in the desert, were all forced to drink of a wine-cup of fury which had been mingled for them. It was a time of far-reaching destruction and desolation. The great conqueror, the destroyer of boundaries, had gone forth; God had given the inhabitants of the earth into his hands for a certain season; no strength or policy would avert or delay the sentence. The prophet's message was a very comprehensive one, but its force was not to be lost in its generality. He was to tell "all the cities of Judah who came to worship in the Lord's house, diminishing not a word, 'Thus saith the Lord, If ye will not hearken unto me, to walk in my law which I have set before you, I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.'" The priests and the prophets insisted that the foreteller of evil should be put to death; the princes and the people said, "He is not worthy to die, he hath spoken to us in the Name of the Lord." The elders of the land alleged the conduct of Hezekiah to Micah in his defence. But it is evident that the priestly influence would have prevailed with Jehoiakim in his case, as it did in that of another prophet who is referred to in the same place, if a powerful courtier, Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, had not protected him.

He seems to have shut up Jeremiah for the same reason as that which led the Elector of Saxony to shut up Luther after the Diet of Worms. In the thirty-sixth chapter he says to Baruch (the time is assigned to the fourth year of Jehoiakim), that "he cannot go into the house of the Lord," and therefore that Baruch must read a roll which he had written in the ears of the people in the Lord's house, upon the fasting day. There was no doubt a great assembly gathered from all the cities of Judah. They were told of woes which would surely come upon Jerusalem and upon the whole land. Michaiah, the son of Gemariah, heard the words of the roll. He informed the princes; they sent for Baruch. He read it in their ears. They were afraid, both one and the other; they said, "We will surely tell the king all these words." The roll was brought before Jehoiakim as he was sitting in the winter-house with a fire on the hearth burning before him; he cut it and cast it into the fire till it was consumed. Jeremiah was bidden to signify to Jehoiakim by the mouth of Baruch, that the roll was burnt, but that the thing written in the roll could not be burnt. "The king of Babylon would certainly come and destroy the land, and would cause to cease from it man and beast."

That which Jeremiah had been told when he was but a child, that he was to pull down and destroy, was beginning to be fulfilled. Not only his own people in Anathoth, but the kings and priests in Jerusalem, regarded him as a dangerous disturber. He was robbing other kingdoms as well as his own of peace and security. He could not pretend that his words did not unsettle the minds of people as well as rulers. He could not even say that the words were nothing except so far as they pointed to certain events which would either correspond with them or confute them. They were more than this. They went down to the roots and causes of these events; they traced them to principles in the hearts of kings, priests, prophets, and people. Was not this pulling up and plucking down? Was it wonderful that Jehoiakim should burn the roll, and desire to kill him who had dictated it?

But it had also been told Jeremiah, that he was to plant and to build. In the twenty-ninth chapter of the prophecy we hear of a letter which the prophet sent to those whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried captive "after that Zechariah, and the queen, and the eunuchs, and the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, were departed from Jerusalem." Part of this letter contains terrible warnings and denunciations against the prophets who were telling the captives that they should speedily return to their own land; part of it is full of hope and encouragement. The exiles "are to build houses and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them, and take wives and beget sons and daughters, and take wives for their sons that they may bear sons and daughters, that they may be increased there and not diminished." For these are to be the seed of a nation. "Behold," saith the Lord, "I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling-places. And the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof. And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving, and the voice of them that make merry. And I will multiply them, and they shall not be few. I will also glorify them. I will punish all that oppress them. And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall be of the midst of them. And I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people."

All Jeremiah's visions respecting these exiles are soothing and cheerful. He sees much evil among them. But he has such bright intimations of what their future shall be, that his sleep is sweet to him. They are the pledge of a better day, which he shall not see indeed, but which will assuredly come to the land, and which will gladden him, though the places which knew him then should know him no more. The case is altogether different when he turned to Jerusalem, where Zedekiah was reigning. The prophet sees two baskets of figs set before the Temple of the Lord, one very good, like those that are first ripe, the other so bad that they cannot be eaten. The first are those "whom the Lord has sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans"; the others represent Zedekiah and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem that remain in the land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt. All that we hear of the later history helps us to understand the force and truth of this sign. The reign of Zedekiah presents us with the most vivid picture of a king and people sinking deeper and deeper into an abyss, ever and anon making wild and frantic efforts to rise out of it, imputing their evil to every one but themselves, — their struggles for a nominal freedom always proving them to be both slaves and tyrants at heart. Zedekiah has revolted from the king of Babylon who has raised him to the throne. Pashur, the son of Immer the priest, has heard that Jeremiah has prophesied against the city. He smites him and puts him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord. When Jeremiah is brought forth, he has again to declare that Judah shall be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and be carried captive and be slain by the sword, and that Pashur shall be one of the victims. Shortly after, another Pashur is sent by the king to him with a humble message, "Inquire, I pray thee, of the Lord for us, for Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon maketh war against us, if so be that the Lord will deal with us according to all His wondrous works." The Chaldean army actually besieges the city; the proud revolters begin to show their native cowardice; those that mocked and persecuted the prophet think that they may bribe him to help them. But the answer is as before: "I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, wherewith ye fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans, which besiege you without the walls, and I will assemble them into the midst of this city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched arm. And I will smite the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast; they shall die of a great pestilence. He that abideth in the city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he that goeth out and falleth to the Chaldeans, his life shall be unto him for a prey." At the same time he tells the king how he may prove a better patriot than by fighting with the Chaldeans:—

"And touching the house of the king of Judah, say, Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of David; thus saith the Lord, Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor, lest my fury go out like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."

Possibly it was in consequence of this exhortation that an event took place, of which we have the following remarkable record:—

"King Zedekiah made a covenant with all the people which were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty unto them; that every man should let his man-servant, and every man his maid-servant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother."

This act of simple obedience to a command, this recognition of Jewish citizenship and brotherhood, was hailed by Jeremiah as the most blessed of all tokens of reformations. But this was the ignominious conclusion: —

"But afterwards they turned, and caused the servants, and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids."

And this was the prophet's word respecting it: —

"Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. And ye were now turned, and had done right in my sight, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbor: and ye had made a covenant before me in the house which is called by my name: but ye turned and polluted my name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom ye had set at liberty at their pleasure, to return, and brought them into subjection, to be unto you for servants and for handmaids. Therefore thus saith the Lord, Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty every one to his brother, and every man to his neighbor: behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine: and I will make you to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth."

We are not told the motive of the change, but by comparing other passages in the prophecy with the one in which Jeremiah tells the Jewish masters what ruin they are preparing for themselves, we may form a reasonable conjecture. Pharaoh-Nechoh, it appears, resolved upon one more desperate experiment to regain his position. He sent an army to assist Zedekiah against the besiegers. The Chaldeans retreated. The king and the people were of course elated with joy. There was no longer need to buy God's favor by letting the oppressed go free. The help of Egypt was all-sufficient. But some misgiving, it seems, then led the king to desire Jeremiah's prayers that the deliverance might be complete. The answer is, "Behold, Pharaoh's army shall return to Egypt, to their own land, and the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire." Then the prophet "goes out of Jerusalem into the land of Benjamin, to separate himself thence in the midst of the people." The most passionate of patriots is accused of being a traitor. The princes are now as wroth with him as the priests; he is thrown into a dungeon. The poor, feeble king perceives that there is a power and truth in the prophet which he cannot find elsewhere. He sends to the prison to ask if there is any word from the Lord. He is told there is, "for thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Thenceforth Zedekiah is inclined to favor him. He is brought into the court of the prison and has food daily furnished to him. But the princes say unto the king, "Let this man be put to death; for the man seeketh not the welfare of this people, but the hurt." Zedekiah makes the confession so characteristic of such a time, "Behold, he is in your hand; for the king is not he who can do any thing against you." He is thrown into a worse dungeon, where there was no water, but mire; a merciful Ethiopian interferes to save him from death; the king consults him once more. He is told that the only safety is in surrender to the king of Babylon, else he will be taken and the city will be burnt with fire. The princes and the king are now suspicious of each other: Jeremiah is removed again to the court of the prison, and remains there till Jerusalem is taken. That event occurred in the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign. Zedekiah escapes by night; he is bound with chains and his eyes put out: the city is set on fire.

The events which follow are recorded in the last chapter of the Second Book of Kings.

"And as for the people that remained in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, even over them he made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, ruler. And when all the captains of the armies, they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah governor, there came to Gedaliah, to Mizpah, even Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and Johanan the son of Careah, and Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah the son of a Maachathite, they and their men. And Gedaliah sware to them, and to their men, and said unto them, Fear not to be the servants of the Chaldees: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. But it came to pass, in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal, came, and ten men with him, and smote Gedaliah, that he died, and the Jews and the Chaldees that were with him at Mizpah. And all the people, both small and great, and the captains of the armies, arose and came to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldees."

Jeremiah lived on in the land to see the misery and anarchy which followed the murder of Gedaliah; to tell the Jews who were flying to Egypt, that if they stayed in the land they would be safe, that in Egypt they would meet with destruction, for that Egypt had been given up to the king of Babylon; — finally, to sing the future ruin of Babylon itself, the confusion and breaking in pieces of her idols, the deliverance of those in whose destruction and desolation she had rejoiced. In this prophecy many of the phrases of Isaiah recur. We feel the same assurance when we read each, that the words point to an actual city, to a present oppressor, and that they point also with imperishable truth to every city in which the Babylonian principle has become triumphant, to every power which has severed itself from righteousness and has become merely destructive.

What is the thread which binds together the hopes and the fears of the prophet, his certainty of coming woe, his certainty of ultimate blessing? A covenant well ordered in all things, and sure, a covenant resting on the eternal Name of God, upon His truth and righteousness. This covenant, as we have seen, was no external artificial bond. The words, " I am a husband to you," denote the nature of it. It was not an agreement for so much to be given on the part of God if so much was received from man. It was a union of love; a Divine Lord seeking His human bride, binding her to Himself, bidding her trust in Him and depend upon Him for all things. That such a covenant should exist was wonderful, that it should be broken by the party which had been freely taken into it was more wonderful still. Every sign that was presented to the prophet brought the marvel more strongly before him. The adherence of the heathen to their traditions struck him, we have seen, as affording the strongest contrast to the inconsistency of the Israelite. Another fact, which became known to him in the days of Jehoiakim, illustrated still more remarkably the subject to his own mind, and was made the hint of a discourse to the people. Jonadab, the son of Rechab, commanded his sons to dwell in tents and take no wine. In vain the prophet set flagons before them; the precept which had been transmitted to them was too strong and binding for any temptation. It was a silken, invisible chain about their necks, the chain of a mere human command; yet they did not break it. Was it impossible for his countrymen to understand that there was a silken chain, too, about their necks, — a Divine command, a Divine covenant? How was it that they were acting every moment as if none such existed?

All these instances and reflections which the Divine Teacher brought home to the mind of the seer made him understand more profoundly what the nature of the Divine government was, and how it was exercised. He perceived more and more that they were indeed the cords of a man by which God was holding the nation and those who composed it to Himself, that the yoke under which his countrymen were living was an inward, spiritual yoke, not a material or merely legal one; and that the penalty of breaking it was the penalty of losing freedom, of being brought under a heavy and intolerable bondage. No previous prophet, I think, had at all entered into this truth to the same degree as Jeremiah; no one had been led by such a course of individual sufferings to understand in what consists the blessing of obedience, the curse of revolt. And, as we saw in the passage respecting the potter's house, no one had entered so deeply into the truth that God Himself is the reformer, that all real renovation must come from Him.

Hence the step was not difficult to the discovery, glorious and deep as it is, which my text unfolds. He had heard a lament, Rachel, the mother of the Jewish race, weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted because they were not. He had heard the voice of consolation bidding her refrain from weeping, for that her children should come again to their own border. He had heard that the seed, which was to increase and multiply in the land of strangers, was again to possess its own. He had such faith in the promise, that, while he was in the dungeon, he concluded a contract for the purchase of land in Anathoth in the most solemn and legal manner, committing the evidences of the purchase to Baruch that they might be kept against a future day. But what proof was there that the future inhabitants of the land would be more obedient than the former had been? Would they not be creatures of the same flesh and blood, as prone to unbelief and to idolatry? If any thing depended on the difference of character and constitution in one race or another, if human faith and obedience were the moving and determining causes of the Divine mercy, there seemed no hope that the time to come would be better than the time past. But such a shifting sand could never have been the foundation on which man was meant to build. There must be more in the covenant than the mere pledge, "I will be faithful and merciful if you will be obedient." If that was all the Law said, there must be something deeper than law. If this was all that circumcision signified, there must be something mightier than circumcision. "The covenant which I made with your fathers when I took you by the hand to bring you out of Egypt," must give place to another more perfect covenant; and this must be the tenor of it: "I will write my laws in your hearts, and in your minds will I write them." I will not ask you for obedience, and promise blessings outward or spiritual as the fruits of it; but I will give you power to obey, I will put that in you which shall be the living source, the perpetual well-spring, of an ever-fresh obedience.

" And they shall teach no more every man his brother, and every man his neighbor, saying, 'Know the Lord'; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." It shall not be an outward teaching, such as one man imparts in mere phrases and formulas to another. There shall be a more mysterious, more wonderful Teacher, who shall interpret all that is heard from without, who shall Himself be present within you, to bestow each hour new illumination as well as new life.

" For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." Forgiveness, reconciliation, — granted, accomplished, — shall be the ground of this covenant. But a forgiveness and reconciliation which, though accomplished, are fresh and vital and germinant for every person who enters into them and claims them. " Seeing that the whole covenant stands ultimately upon this assurance, 'I will be their God and they shall be my people'; there shall be a communion between me and them, an intercourse which their hardness and forgetfulness may interrupt, but which is really implied in the eternal relation that subsists between us; nay, in all the relations which subsist between them as neighbors and brothers of each other."

Such a covenant Jeremiah saw there must be involved in the law which had been given to his forefathers, a covenant certainly existing in the Divine Mind, though latent, and still only dimly seen by the sons of men. To see it at all, to be able to say confidently, " This must be," to have a Divine assurance that what must be is, and that it will be fully manifested, — this was comfort immeasurable, unspeakable, making dungeons tolerable, and the loss of human friendship a gracious sorrow, the ruin of a city and a land a witness for good, even in proportion to the bitter present misery which it caused. All Jeremiah's dark history becomes bright when this truth dawns upon him, when he is able to dwell in the belief of it.

And yet, brethren, it did but dawn upon him. And Whitsunday tells us that we are living in the very blaze of it. The new covenant has been proclaimed. It is that very one, "I will put my laws in your hearts, and in your minds will I write them." "My Spirit shall dwell in you to be the source of faith and obedience, to resist the evil which will always be assaulting you, to draw you to the good which is always near you, to bring you out of darkness into God's light, out of selfishness into love, out of division into unity. He is given, that you may not each one be holding out to his neighbor mere hard crusts of doctrine, dry intellectual propositions; but that the humblest peasant, the feeblest child, may have in him that which responds to the highest truth and can embrace it. He is come as a witness and pledge that a reconciliation has been made for the universe, that man is at peace with God in His Son, who has offered the perfect and well-pleasing sacrifice. He is come to assure us that the Father has made all things new, grounding them on the revelation of His own eternal Name, His own absolute love."

This is the covenant into which we are born by our baptism. But oh! brethren, do we believe that it is so? Do we believe that God has said to us, "I will put my laws in your hearts, and in your minds will I write them; I will be to you a father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters"? Do we believe that a peace and forgiveness has been proclaimed to us and to mankind, that we may feed upon the sacrifice in which they are gathered up, that we may have communion with the Love that has bestowed them? Do we think that there is an unction within us, whereby we and the most miserable people of this land may enter into the meaning of the deepest mysteries, and that we need not merely receive them with our outward ears, but be renewed by them in the very spirit of our minds? Alas! brethren, let us confess it, we do not believe this. The divine truth of Whitsuntide is floating away from us. We do not grasp it, we do not live upon it. And therefore we sigh in vain for reformation. For the Divine power which is to bring reformation is hidden from us.

Like the Jews, we think we are delivered over to the evils which bitter experience shows that we are prone to commit. If it can be proved that our forefathers and we have yielded to covetousness, strife, rivalries, our wise men ask triumphantly whether these are not established principles of human nature, and treat the struggle with these as one which only boys or fanatics would engage in. It is in vain to answer, that men have struggled with them in all ages, and that, unless some victories had been won over them, society would have ceased to exist. It is in vain to say that all the improvements, moral, intellectual, physical, of which we boast, have been the consequences of a divinely formed resolution in the hearts of a few men, generally scorned by their contemporaries, to overcome what had been reckoned inevitable evils, involved in the constitution of things. The ready and decisive reply, that all such changes are owing to the "Progress of Civilization," — owing, that is to say, to a certain formula which we do not choose to translate into the facts for which it stands, — disposes of all such arguments. No doubt we can reverence those who have fought and fallen in the endeavor to break some chain of custom, and to vindicate some eternal law of God, when they are removed to a safe distance. We build the sepulchres of the prophets whom our fathers killed, and say that if we had been in the days of our fathers we would not have partaken of their sins. But unless we fully believe that the Spirit of the Prophets is intended for us and can work in us as He worked in them, — unless we believe that He is come to convince us of our sins and of a righteousness which is stronger than our sins, and of a judgment which shall put down the one and give the other a complete victory, — we had better have left the sepulchres unbuilt; we had better not pretend to honor the memories of men whom, if we had met them face to face, we should certainly have hated. It is a fearful thought that Israel was subjected to a Babylonian captivity of seventy years, and has been subjected to a worse than Babylonian tyranny for eighteen hundred years, because it counted the Covenant of God a dead document instead of a living power. It is a more appalling question, what must be in reserve for those nations which will not have the law of God written in their hearts; which choose to follow their own lower instincts; which say to the Holy Spirit, " Depart from us."

But as there was a light in that thick darkness, so there is in this. The Covenant of God cannot fail; the purpose of God must be accomplished. There must come a day when God shall be known as the Father of all the Families of the Earth, and when they will not refuse to be His children.

SERMON XXV.

THE HEAVENS OPENED TO THE EXILE.

LINCOLN'S INN, TRINITY SUNDAY. — JUNE 6, 1852.

> Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. — EZEKIEL i. 1.

THE Book of Lamentations throws much light upon the time to which it refers, and upon the prophetical character. I have no wish to pass it over. But in strict chronology it follows the earlier chapters of Ezekiel, seeing that its subject is the destruction of the city and the temple, to which Ezekiel, as he sat among the captives by the river Chebar, was still looking forward. The difference even of a few years, at this critical period of the history, may affect the meaning of a whole book. There are passages in the later chapters of Ezekiel which may illustrate and receive illustration from the Lamentations of Jeremiah. On these grounds I believe I am justified in postponing the consideration of them, even if I had not the additional motive, that there is scarcely a passage in the Old Testament which seems more suitable for a discourse upon Trinity Sunday, than the one I have just read to you.

Ezekiel was, like Jeremiah, of the priestly order. Since we cannot understand the expression "thirtieth year," otherwise than as describing his own age, he was probably older than Jeremiah was when the word of the Lord first came to him. But he had not reached the time of life which we commonly connect with our impressions of a prophet, — those impressions being perhaps derived from the great painter of the prophets and the sibyls. He had, however, seen and felt what might have made his hair gray even at such an age. He had seen the best king Judea ever had dying in the war with Egypt; his successor a captive there; Jehoiakim passing from one foreign yoke to another that was more grievous; Jeconiah doomed to hopeless servitude in Babylon. He must have mixed with those miserable priests and prophets who rent the heart of Jeremiah. He was himself taken from the services of the temple with a troop of rich and noble prisoners; he had to sit among them astonished at their levity and indifference; to watch their alternations of cowardly despondency and idle hope; to hear the prophets uttering divinations as vain and lying as those which they uttered in prosperity; to find himself amidst strangers, his own countrymen being scarcely less strangers to all that was occupying him than their oppressors. To be removed from the city which God had chosen as the witness for Himself; to be in a land full of altars and temples and images, given up to idols and yet triumphant over the earth, — what did it mean? who could tell him? The captives by the river of Chebar could tell him nothing. They might be stupefied by the change; the signification of it was utterly hidden from them.

It was while he sat among these captives that he saw visions of God. The words seem only to imply that he was dwelling ordinarily with them; we are not prevented from believing that he was alone, out of the din and clatter of human tongues, when he saw the "whirlwind coming out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness about it, and out of the midst thereof, as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire." Retirement was not impossible even for a captive; we need not doubt that Ezekiel availed himself of so great a privilege. But we ought to recollect — the words force that thought upon us — that Ezekiel was not in circumstances favorable to contemplation, that he was not assisted by familiar objects, that his mind had not been kept quiet and calm from disturbing influences. The heavens were not opened to an abstracted philosopher or devotee any more than to a man in the midst of the comforts of a home, reposing in an undisputed faith; but to an exile drawn by force, not choice, out of his land, full of the darkest thoughts about the past and the future, tempted by every thing he heard and saw to doubt whether there was any reality in the things which he could not see and hear.

The question naturally suggests itself to a person who reads this opening chapter of Ezekiel, and then the after parts of the book, what have they to do with each other? Why should it be necessary that a man who had to announce the moral maxims which form so conspicuous a part of this prophecy, should first begin with seeing the likeness of four living creatures, and wheels within wheels, and a chariot lifted from the earth, and rings so high that they were dreadful, and a firmament over the head, and a throne with the likeness of a man? How should this be a preparation for telling the watchmen of Israel, that, if they did not warn the sinner of the evil of his ways, his blood would be required at their hands? How was it a preparation for the argument which proved that a son was not to die for the iniquity of his father, that the proverb, "If the fathers have eaten sour grapes, the children's teeth are set on edge," was a lying proverb? How was it a preparation for the personal sorrows which the prophet was to bear? We might have expected, it may be said, some high and mystical imaginations to have mixed with the simple precepts; we may not wonder at those difficult passages respecting a more august temple than the one Nebuzaradan set on fire, which occur at the end of the prophecy. But why should such a vision as this be the initiation of a seer who was to concern himself with the coarsest evils and miseries of the actual world, as much as any of his predecessors?

If you reflect, brethren, on the position and duties of a Jewish prophet as they have come out before us in former lectures, you will not be at a loss for the resolution of this difficulty. We are wont to say that the theology of the Jew was simple, that of the heathen world complex and artificial. We speak rightly. But however intricate the relations of the gods may seem to us in the Greek pantheon, however interminable their offices and attributes in the pantheon of the Hindoo, every one of these divinities has acquired his place and recognition from some natural instinct in the human heart. Priests may have organized the worship, may have made that systematic which would have been incoherent. But some sensual perception, some movement of a man's nature towards an object which inspired him with terror or hope, some tender association or local sympathy, the struggle of some inward conception to find a suitable expression for itself, may be traced through every variation of a people's worship, may be discovered in the production of every fresh idol. If therefore by simple we mean easy, natural, that which men would adopt if left to themselves, we are bound to change our mode of speaking, and to say that polytheism is more simple than the belief of a One living God. We revolt at such a conclusion, — we cannot help revolting at it, — but that revolting is a proof that the word "simple" is *not* synonymous with the word "obvious" or "natural," that the most obvious views of the Godhead may be the most coarse and sensual and false.

Are we to conclude, then, that a belief in the Divine Unity is the result of a series of experiments which show how a number of different forms may be expressed under one general name? Are we to say that, when nations have acquired greater powers of abstraction, they arrive at this belief? Reason will tell us, experience will tell us if we do not listen to reason, that a god who is abstracted from a multitude of gods is not a living being at all; but a mere *caput mortuum.* Dear and venerable traditions, whispers of the conscience, longings of the heart, prevent men from saying, "It is nothing." They invest it with the old name, they try to look upon it as the highest concentration of the life which they see moving through all things. But gradually, as the intellect becomes bolder and the affections and fears which have sustained it are dried up, the terrible secret is first whispered, then openly proclaimed: "This abstract divinity *is* nothing; it is not a substance, but a shadow of our minds. We who created it can destroy it."

The simplicity of the Jewish prophet arose from this; that he did not follow his instincts and impulses whithersoever they led him; that he did not make any effort to reduce the things which he saw under one common name; that he asked for a substance beneath himself, for a living Being deeper than all the thoughts which were in him, than himself to whom those thoughts belonged,—for One who had made him in His own image. He believed that such a Being had revealed Himself to his fathers, was revealing Himself continually. He was about his path and about his bed, spying out all his ways. To know Him was to know Righteousness and Truth; to keep His law, to be conformed to His mind, was to *be* righteous and true.

Hence several consequences followed. The first is, that he uniformly spoke of *seeing* God, of having a *vision* of God; using this language most carefully when he was protesting with the greatest vehemence against every sensible representation of God. As truly as the summit of any mountain existed, though it was lost in mists, so truly did God live, though none confessed Him; as truly as the summit of a mountain discovered itself, the mists gradually rolling away, so truly did God unveil Himself to the man himself, forcing him to recognize His presence and to feel that he stood in the most wonderful relation to Him. This revelation could only be described as the coming forth of a Light; it was not the light of an outward sun; it must be the Light of which that which is gathered up in outward suns is the image. It was not a bodily eye which received this light; but it *was* an eye; you could give it no other name. God Himself must have opened it that it might behold Him; in His light it saw light.

Hence it followed, also, that the theology of the prophets was the ground of all their human morality. Every perception of what man is, and what he ought to do, must rest upon some perception of what God is, and of what He does. To affirm what image it behooves a man to show forth without referring to the archetype, to lay down rules how a man shall govern himself and others without declaring how God governs, was in their minds a vanity, nay, an impossibility. It seemed to them an utterly vain thing to call upon men to carry out any right conviction, or to turn from any evil, if they could not say confidently, authoritatively, God Himself is bidding you take this course, is bidding you forsake that. He is near you, urging you and therefore enabling you to fulfil His commands, to cast away all fetters which hinder you from fulfilling them.

These principles are common to all the prophets, and yet I think you will see why they were sure to come forth with a new power and under new aspects in the mind and discourses of Ezekiel. An Israelite in the land of the uncircumcised, a priest banished from the temple, is an object we have not yet been invited to contemplate. At first the sense of loss — if it did not give way to that *insensibility*, that incapacity of feeling at all, which the best men often experience after some heavy calamity — must have been unspeakable. Had not God utterly forsaken them? Could He be in that place? Then out of this loneliness and despondency would come the certain conviction, "He must be here." The forms of Nature which have been set up as rivals of Him, do they not testify of Him? That whirlwind from the North which I hear gathering at a distance, which now approaches me, which seems to encircle me with its gusts and eddies; — that cloud with its fantastic, mocking shapes; — that subtle, mighty fire, with its mysterious circles and involutions, with the beauty and radiance which make one forget for a moment its more terrible ministries; — and then those forms of animal life, the different kinds of living creatures in each of which the Chaldeans have seen some image of divine power, each of which has been to them a consecrated idol, which in our Temple expressed not objects of worship, but the Seraphim and Cherubim who cry, Holy, Holy, Holy! to the Lord of the whole earth; —

what forms and symbols are here, what a world of mysteries I am dwelling in! But these creatures to which the men about me are bowing down, do they not point upwards to Man himself? Is there not stamped upon them all a likeness and prophecy of him? It seems as if his image were continually emerging out of their forms, as if he were the object and pattern after which they were all aspiring. Yet they preserve their distinct natures, their several functions. What unites them together? How can natures so various, so dissonant, be living portions of the same universe? I must go deeper still. These creatures, — to what do they owe their movements, their life? That eagle has wings which lift him from the earth and sustain him as he rises towards the sun. The Chaldean sees in him the manifestation of the highest, most celestial power. But he looks upon the lion, the ox, and the man as also manifestations of this power. He would clothe them, too, with wings. He supposes them tied to earth, but with a capacity of ascending above it. And he cannot be wrong. For there is in Man a spirit which gives him wings, which carries him into the highest and most distant worlds. Is he not meant to obey this spirit, to ascend by its power, to exalt all the lower creatures with him? Is not this the true secret of the order which I discern in the midst of so much disorder? Is there not a spirit which gives all things their distinctions, their places, their kinds; — which is the spring of their movements, which binds them together, wheel within wheel, preserving unity amidst infinite diversity?

I do not pretend, brethren, to thread the mazes of this wonderful vision. There is much of it in which I cannot the least see my way; I feel how dim and faint my glimpses are of those portions of it of which I have any apprehension. But I do not think I can be wrong in believing that the prophet, cast into the wide world and feeling himself lost in it, was led by the Divine Teacher into a region of thought to which the Israelite had been hitherto comparatively a stranger,—was led to see how each part of the universe, which must have often seemed to him a storehouse of divided material idols, was pointing, when seen by the Divine Light, to a spiritual unity as its explanation and its centre.

To a *spiritual* unity; for whatever different meanings the vision may be susceptible of, this is certainly implied in them all, that it is Spirit only which distinguishes and unites, which brings each thing forth in its clearness and fulness, and brings all into harmony. And that truth, precious as it is, would still be a maimed and imperfect one, a vision of the world, and of man as meant to rise above the world, but unable to distinguish himself from it, if the spirit which is in the living creatures, actuating and inspiring them, lifting up the wheels from the earth, and working in the midst of them, were not acknowledged as a spirit which had come from some higher region. The man who was seen among the animal forms, the man who rose above them, is still not humanity in its highest perfection. Ezekiel saw a throne, and there was a likeness, as of the appearance of a Man, above upon it. There is One human and divine, from whom this spirit has proceeded, in whom it dwells perfectly. Beneath that divine form is a glory, too awful for the prophet's gaze. He falls upon his face and listens while a voice speaks to him.

"Is it then," some one will ask, "in very deed the mystery of this day which the prophet's vision is bringing before us? Does not such a notion proceed from the eagerness of the imagination to find analogies where they do not exist, or from our foolish desire to establish a doctrine which is above comprehension, not by a simple appeal to faith, but by hints and allusions drawn from teachers who would have been utterly perplexed by our interpretation of their thoughts and language ? "

Brethren, let me speak plainly on this point. I do not say that you will find the doctrine which we have been proclaiming to-day in this chapter. I do not believe that you can. I have not the slightest wish to find it there or to put it there. It would be a shock to all my convictions if I thought that Ezekiel was enunciating a dogma when he professed to be recording a vision; or that the mystery, which, as the Church teaches us by the order of her services, could not be revealed till Christ was glorified and the Spirit given, was already made known to the prophet as he sat among the captives by the river Chebar. I cannot say how much mischief seems to me to be done, when, instead of striving to follow strictly the actual statements of the Old Testament writers, we insist upon wringing out of texts or symbols, which we have moulded according to our fancy, the proof of some New Testament revelation. It is not the Law and the Prophets only which suffer from such violence. The Gospels and the Apostles suffer much more. The truths which they set forth as living foundations of our existence, social and personal, shrivel into jejune formulas, subjects for controversy and reviling, prized mainly as tests by which other men may be convicted of error.

But just because this course seems to me so exceedingly dangerous, so carefully and religiously to be avoided, I would try to learn from the old prophets what they knew and how they became possessed of their knowledge. Ezekiel had been taught upon his mother's knees the words, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord"; he had been trying to fulfil the commandment which is joined to that great announcement, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy mind and all thy strength." He had been carried into a land where every thing seemed to contradict this faith. What he saw might tempt him to worship many gods. Or it might tempt him to case himself in his Judaical profession, in his Levitical lore. He might say, "I have been trained to a certain worship, and I will adhere to it. Let the Babylonians have their gods if they will; I shall do homage to the One." Such a resolution would have a look of steadfastness and fidelity. And it had this further advantage. No Babylonian would have interfered with it. The Jew, like every other tributary, was expected in general to follow the traditions of his fathers; they might strike the conquerors as very absurd; but except on special occasions, or when the tyrant was a fanatical devotee, they would be respected as suitable to the person who had inherited them. But Ezekiel cannot follow this course. He cannot live upon a tradition. He cannot find rest in merely thinking of the difference between him and the Chaldeans. He is not faithful to his traditions, unless he believes in a God who is as living for him as for his forefathers. He cannot worship the Lord God of Israel unless he worships Him as the God of the Chaldeans also. It was a grand thing, no doubt, to know that there is one God, a blessing beyond all blessings. But merely to deny that there are many gods, was that a blessing? Merely to hold a dogma that was contrary to other men's, was that a divine gift? The Teacher who is near him, who is preparing him for a work, will not let him be content with such a miserable possession. He draws him into the secret of unity. He shows him how all the manifold things which he beholds imply it, demand it, cry out for it. He leads him to a unity which is not a dead negation of plurality. He makes him feel that there is no unity in matter, that we only believe in unity when we believe in a Spirit. He brings him to think of man as the interpreter and ruler of all the things to which he has done homage, as the priest who is intended to present them to the Lord of All, because he is a spiritual being. But Ezekiel perceives that he can only fulfil this kingly and sacerdotal function when he is under the government of a Spirit which is higher than his own. That Spirit must come from a Man. That Man must be the Priest of priests, the King of kings. Even there he cannot stop. There must be a deeper mystery still. There must be One of whose glory this Man is the brightness, of whose person He is the express image.

So much I believe was revealed to Ezekiel. By slow steps, by painful experiences, he was led into the heart of this mystery. It was his deliverance from idolatry. It was his deliverance from hard, material, negative Judaism. It was the ground of his message to his own people and to all nations.

I do not believe that this mystery is the mystery of the Trinity; because Christ says that the time would come when He would tell His disciples plainly of the Father. There is here no utterance of *that* Name. The prophet sunk down in awe and wonder at the presence of the Man on the throne. Beyond was fire and the brightness of amber; glorious and transcendent images, no doubt, upon which a man may gaze and in which he may lose himself, but which he is glad to leave for any thing that recalls him to a home and to human sympathies. Till a Name expressing the deepest awfulness in fellowship with such sympathies could be uttered, till the Man on the throne could be declared as the Son, the only begotten of the Father, till that Spirit in which Ezekiel saw the ground of all the unity of human beings and earthly things could be proclaimed as He in whose unity the Father and the Son dwell for ever, there was still a dark enigma, which every new idolatry, every new philosophy, was trying to solve, and by the solution was drawing men further from the eternal Truth and the eternal Love. But though I do not find here the statement and development of that mystery which I regard as the fundamental one of our dispensation, I do think that Ezekiel is one of the greatest guides of mankind into an apprehension of it. I call it the fundamental truth of our dispensation. I mean the truth which lies beneath the unity of the Church and of human society, the truth which reconciles the contradictions of warring philosophical systems, the truth which interprets the different idolatrous faiths of the old and the new world, the truth by virtue of which those who are baptized into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost become the heralds of a common life and a divine kingdom to all nations, the truth which sets forth the full righteousness and love of God, the truth upon which, therefore, the moral condition of man will be found ultimately to depend. But, brethren, I am far indeed from saying that any age of the Christian Church has entered fully into the inheritance which God has given us. There has been a confounding of the Persons and a dividing of the Substance by orthodox men as well as by heretics, perhaps as much by one as the other. There would have been no strifes, and contradictions, and heart-burnings, if it had not been so. And oh! how dare I affirm that we, at this period, are truly and faithfully acknowledging the glory of the eternal Trinity, and in the power of the Divine Majesty worshipping the Unity? We are doing it perhaps at times. We may long in our innermost hearts to do it continually. But we must, I think, one and all, be conscious of difficulties, far more serious than any that disturb our intellectual apprehension of the doctrine, which interfere with this holy and blessed service. Every thing is received according to the character and capacity of the receiver. How should a set of quarrelsome and factious men know any thing about the unity of God?

And therefore Ezekiel's vision contains another lesson — shall I call it a prophecy? — for us. It may be, brethren, that we shall be initiated into the fulness of this truth in the very way in which he was initiated into the part of it which he could know. It may be that only when all the signs of God's presence are withdrawn, only when there are no churches or confessions or forms of worship testifying of His Name, only when we are surrounded by idolaters, or when pantheism — the complex or abstract of idolatries — has become the profession of all cultivated men, or when a conscious atheism has taken place of an unconscious one among statesmen and among priests, — it may be that then only shall we know what a power was lying in the old creed of Christendom to interpret the mysteries of nature, as well as those of our own minds and of our human relations. It may be that the physical world, which seems so clear to us, will itself present to us only a mass of confusions and contradictions, and that, in order to recover any distinct apprehension of its laws, we shall have to see how they are connected with a Spirit who is higher than themselves. It may be that through nature we shall be led, not, as our fathers of the last century fancied that they were led, up to nature's God, — who proved to be only a great Demiurgus, a being apart from all human sympathies, — but to the Man in the midst of the throne, who, when we come to Him weary and heavy laden to seek that lowliness of heart which we have not in ourselves, will teach us of the Father. And so we may become little children again, and recover the joy which our Pagan forefathers felt when they were first told of One who so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son for it, of a Son who died for them, of a Spirit who guideth into all truth.

The analogy of history, still more, I think, the signs of this time, suggest these reflections to us. And though there is bitterness in them, there is also consolation. But we need not wait, brethren, till the lesson comes to us in this form. If we do, there is fear that we shall never learn it. Now, — while Trinity Sundays, and eucharists, and the birth of every child into the fold of Christ, speak of this mystery, — now we may ask, that, through whatever symbols of nature or art, through whatever divine ordinances, the sense and dream of it are brought to our hearts, it may not be a dream, or an imagination, but a reality there; one to which we may turn in hours of solitude and darkness, one into which we shall enter most when we are most emptied of ourselves, when we have confessed how our vanity and lusts and strifes have hidden it from us, and have taken from us, along with it, the consciousness of our humblest duties and the power of fulfilling them.

SERMON XXVI.

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES.

LINCOLN'S INN, 1ST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY. — JUNE 13, 1852.

> The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about. And behold, there were very many in the open valley, and lo, they were very dry. And He said unto me, "Son of Man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." — EZEKIEL xxxvii. 1 – 3.

WE are naturally curious to know whether two contemporary prophets ever conversed with each other. In Micah we found such evident indications of sympathy with the mind of Isaiah, as warranted the supposition that he was his pupil. I cannot trace any signs of a similar relation, or indeed of any personal relation, between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Though they were passing through the same crisis; though they had both to witness the evils which were destroying their nation, both to share its miseries; though the false prophets were the common enemies of both; yet their circumstances, their character, and their work were entirely distinct, in some points even contrasted. Their very differences, however, show us that they were both alike prophets and priests.

The Book of Lamentations exhibits the spirit of the individual man Jeremiah more transparently than his longer book, which is so mixed up with historical details, with anticipations of a ruin not yet accomplished, with hopes, however faint and soon dispelled, of a national repentance. Most of those whom the prophet had denounced were banished or dead. Men could talk no more about the temple of the Lord, could boast no more that the word of the Lord was with them; the vessel which the potter was shaping had been broken in pieces. The sadness of the prophet, which had been checked sometimes by indignation, sometimes by the consciousness of a word which must still be spoken, of a work which must be done, became complete and absorbing. Heretofore his intense sympathy with his country might seem to be qualified by his lively apprehension of its crimes; now both feelings were blended into one. When he looked upon the desolation of the city, there sat upon his soul a weight of sorrow and evil, as if he were representing his whole people, as if there was no wrong which they had committed, no evil habit which they had contracted, which did not cling to him, for which he was not responsible. And this was no imaginary, fictitious state of mind into which he had worked himself. God had made him inwardly conscious of the very corruptions which had destroyed the land. If he had made any fight against them, if they did not actually overpower him and enslave him, this was God's work and not his; the promise of the covenant made with his fathers, which was as good for every one as for himself, was fulfilled to him. And now he was realizing the full effect of this discipline. The third chapter of the Lamentations, beginning, "I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of His wrath," contains the climax of his experience. In the memorable passages which follow, the history of a life is gathered up. "I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord; remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath them still in remembrance. This I recall to mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for Him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, because he hath borne it upon him. He putteth his mouth in the dust if so be there may be hope. He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him, he is filled full with reproach. The Lord will not cast off for ever; but though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

Any thing more individual than these utterances it is impossible to conceive; and yet it is just by these that one understands the sacerdotal work to which Jeremiah was called. There was no longer any temple. The priests, as well as the princes, had been for the most part carried away by Nebuchadnezzar. But there was a man walking about in the deserted city to which the twelve tribes had come up, in the midst of the ruins of the holy place into which the sons of Aaron had gone with the memorial of their names on their breast-plates, who really entered into the meaning of that function, who really bore the iniquities of the children of Israel before the Lord; one to whom it was given to translate the ceremonies and services of the divine house into life and reality. He had been taught more perfectly, perhaps, than any one who had served in the temple, what was implied in its worship and sacrifices. He felt the burden to which those sacrifices pointed, the burden of individual and national sins. Yet with that burden resting upon him, he could enter into the presence of the Holy One of Israel. He was sure there was a deliverance for his people as well as for himself, that there could not be one for him if there was not also one for them. Thus, when part of his work was over, when he had nothing more to say in the ears of the kings or priests or people, this office, which had been so closely connected with his prophetical office, and which, if it had depended upon outward conditions, must have been more entirely at an end than that, still remained in all its original power. And the words of the prophet remain to explain to all generations the spiritual character and acts of the priest.

The office of the priest must have seemed to be more utterly extinct for Ezekiel than even for Jeremiah. He was forcibly removed from all the associations of the temple while it was yet standing. When he was called to be a prophet to the captives by the river Chebar, he might have supposed that the earlier designation which belonged to him as one of the Levitical family, had been extinguished in the later one. Yet we have seen how he was instructed, at the very commencement of his work as a prophet, that the glory of Him who filled the temple was surrounding him in Mesopotamia as it surrounded him when he went up to present the morning or the evening sacrifice in Jerusalem. Such a vision was given him of that glory as he had never beheld in the holy place. He found that the earth — that common, profane, Babylonian earth upon which he dwelt — was filled with it. All the powers of nature, the forms of animals, man as the highest of the animals, the motions and order of the outward world and of human society, were pointing towards it.

And the central object, the highest object which he could behold, though there was an ineffable brightness beyond, was a Man upon a throne, One who could command him, in whose Name he was to go forth, whose words he was to speak.

This was no isolated revelation or dream. The very name which the prophet thenceforth bore, the name by which he was to know himself, depended upon it. "*Son of Man*, stand upon thy feet and I will speak unto thee," were the first words which he heard after he fell upon his face. That great title is bestowed upon him through all the time in which he was prophesying. It was in many ways more suitable to him than to those who had gone before him. There was now no Hezekiah or Josiah to represent — in some measure consciously to represent — the divine king. The witnesses for a kingdom seemed to be at an end. Nebuchadnezzar was the lord of the earth. At such a time the natural position of the Jewish seer became a human position. The Israelite's glory was to be a "Son of Man."

Yet he was not absolved from any of the obligations of the older prophets; he was not to expect a more willing or attentive audience among captives than they had found at home; briers, thorns, would be with him; he must dwell among scorpions. Lamentations and mourning and woe filled his roll, as much as that which Baruch wrote out for Jeremiah. And he must eat this roll; it must become a part of his very soul; its words must come forth living and burning out of himself.

He must understand, besides, all the fearful responsibilities of the prophet. He was to speak, whether the men about him would hear or whether they would forbear. There were times when his tongue would cleave to the roof of his mouth, when he should be dumb, and should not be to them a reprover. But when God opened his lips, the blood of those to whom he was sent was upon him; it would be required at his hands if they died in their iniquity and he had not warned them. He must submit to do all symbolical acts, however strange and fantastical they might seem in themselves, which might bring the feeling of coming judgments home to a sense-bound people. He must act a mimic siege, he must eat defiled bread; he must cut off his hair and weigh it in balances, if so the people could be made to understand — in spite of their false prophets, who spoke of coming peace and enacted *their* signs, which of course involved no discomfort or humiliation to themselves — that the city would really be destroyed and the sanctuary laid waste. He was to persuade his brother captives that they were a remnant in which the nation still lived, a stock out of which it should hereafter grow and flourish, even though they were most rebellious, dreaming of good things which would never come, not waiting for that good which God had designed for them. There was to be the same end in all the punishments which were coming upon the land, and in all its deliverances. God was saying in all, "I AM THE LORD."

This sentence recurs again and again in the prophecies of Ezekiel. It is *the* thought of his mind, the one which gives all the sublimity and all the practical worth to his discourses, that the knowledge of God is the supreme good of man, and that the desolation of his countrymen has come from their not liking to retain it. He is transported in spirit to the temple. There the same vision of the glory of God which he had seen by the river returns to him. The light of it shows him, portrayed upon the wall of the temple round about, the abominable beasts and creeping things, and the idols of the house of Israel; what the ancients of the house of Israel did in the dark, every one in the chambers of his imagery; how the women were weeping for Thammuz; how the men were worshipping the sun towards the east. Whether such abominations as these were actually to be seen in the temple, or whether the prophet's eye, opened by the Divine Spirit, saw that they were possessing the hearts of those who seemed to others, perhaps to themselves, to be worshipping the God of their fathers, it is clear that the mind of Ezekiel was led back to the place in which he had ministered, that he might be taught how little the sacred building could preserve the truth which was enshrined in it.

What Ezekiel has seen in the temple enables him to answer the elders of Israel when they come to consult him in his own house. Just what was going on among those who worshipped in Jerusalem was going on in the hearts of those who sought his oracles. They were setting up idols there. They wanted to know what God would do with them or against them; they did not want to know Him. And therefore Ezekiel announces to them a great and eternal moral law, one of the most varied application: "God will answer you according to your idols. The truth which is presented to you will be colored, distorted, inverted, by the eye which receives it. The covetousness which you are cherishing will make the best and divinest word you hear a minister of covetousness. Your pride and your lust will make it a minister of lust and pride." No bolder or more awful paradox was ever enunciated than this, nor one which the conscience of every one will more surely verify. And there was this special proof of courage in making such an announcement, that it must have destroyed Ezekiel's reputation as a prophet. The elders came in terror, feeling that they wanted guidance, and expecting some ready-made answer, such as the regular traders in prophecy could always furnish. The truly inspired man answers, "I can tell you nothing, — nothing at least that will not deceive you and become a lie in your minds. For you bring lies with you, and, except they be extirpated, they must convert whatever is added to them from without to their own quality."

Ezekiel himself illustrates in another case this great principle. No commandment had established itself more completely by the experience of the people to whom it was addressed than the second. The idolatries of the land had accumulated with each generation. Each had cause to complain of the last as bequeathing it a stock of corrupt habits and traditions; the sins of the fathers had been visited upon the children. These were facts not to be gainsaid. The captives had leisure to reflect upon them. It might have been a most profound and profitable reflection.

The use they made of it was to prove they were under a necessary law of degeneracy. How could they help themselves? The fathers had eaten sour grapes, and *their* teeth were set on edge. Who dared dispute it? There was God's own word for it. Had he not told them the plan and method of His own government? Such language addressed to one of the favorite preachers or prophets of the people would have silenced him altogether. He would have said, "It is a mystery, no doubt; we must take the words of the commandment, though we cannot understand them. God is a Sovereign; He can do what He likes. If it pleases Him that each generation should be more corrupt than the last, we must submit and not dispute His will." Others there would be who would complain boldly, and with good reason, of a will that compelled to evil, but yet would lazily submit to it, supposing it to be inevitable, though feeling the absurdity of calling it Divine. Ezekiel boldly stands forth to dispute and deny the whole principle. He does not dispute or deny the second commandment, — that was probably the text of his discourse; but he will not let the second commandment, or any other words in the world, be pleaded against the character of God. Righteousness and equity he maintains to be the foundation of the Divine character and of the Divine acts. He will tolerate no resolution of them into a heathenish notion of sovereignty or self-will. "The ways of God are equal," he says, "and your ways are unequal." The sins of the father only descend upon the son, they are only punished in the son when the son accepts them, entertains them, makes them his own. At any time he may turn round and repudiate them, and cleave to the God who doth not will the death of the sinner, but desires that he should return and live. The doctrine of this celebrated chapter is grounded on the doctrine of the second commandment and of the whole law, that a man is righteous so long as he cleaves to the righteous God who has made a covenant with him, unrighteous when he forsakes that covenant and acts independently. Therefore the notion of any perpetuity in righteousness or in evil is equally cut off. Every man has the capacity of righteousness, the capacity of evil. Let him be ever so righteous, he must become evil the moment he ceases to trust in God and begins to trust in himself. Let him be ever so evil, he must become righteous the moment he begins to trust in God and ceases to trust in himself.

The enunciation of laws or principles seems more especially to belong to Ezekiel, as the experience of personal evil and the sympathy with national sorrow belong more to the tender and womanly nature of Jeremiah. Nevertheless Ezekiel was to be a priest in this sense also, as well as in that higher sense of beholding the glory of God and proclaiming His Name. Suffering was not the destination of one prophet; it was the badge of all the tribe. Ezekiel's life was to be a continual parable, illustrative of the life of the nation. A man scrupulously careful of the law was to violate the precepts of it respecting food, and to eat what was loathsome. A man sensitive, probably, as to his reputation, and with that kind of lofty imagination which makes attention to details and all petty acts unspeakably painful, must submit, for the sake of his countrymen, to such as seemed most ignominious to himself and perplexing to them. Finally, the desire of his eyes must be taken from him with a stroke, and he must not mourn or weep. Even at such a time he must be a sign to the people, though by doing so he should seem to refuse the sympathy that he most wants, and should only lead the captives to say, " Wilt thou not tell us what these things are to us that thou doest so?"

Apart from these sufferings which concerned him individually and domestically, the vision of the desolation of Israel became every day more overwhelming to him. Nor was it only the desolation of Israel. He who was called " Son of Man," was not likely to speak less of Egypt and Tyrus, and the land in which he was himself dwelling, than those older prophets who had so many more reasons for regarding Judea as the one garden of the Lord. The arms of Nebuchadnezzar had been turning the earth upside down and making it waste. Every thing must have seemed to him disjointed, incoherent, withered. Could it ever be renovated? Was it possible even for that country which

God had blessed above all others, and man had cursed above all others, to breathe and live again?

This was the question which was proposed to the prophet on that day when the hand of the Lord was upon him and he was carried into the valley which was full of bones. The vision, clear as it is in itself, must not be read apart from the context of the prophecy. You should remember where Ezekiel was dwelling; by what kind of people he was surrounded; what was the condition of his own land; what had come and was coming upon all lands; or you will not understand the picture which now rose up before him. You should think, too, of the man himself, of the heat of his spirit, of the words which he had uttered in vain, of the acts which had only made the captives stare vacantly, of the desolation of his house and his heart. You should think of those other visions he had of the ascending scale of creatures, of the mysterious order of the universe, of the glory of God, before you place yourself beside him in the valley, and walk with him round about it, and look at the different bones, and see how each separately, how all together, they expound to him the condition of the house of Israel. It was dead, — that body from which he had believed that life was to go forth to quicken the universe. It had none of the beauty of a corpse, in which there is still form, on which the spirit has left its impression. There had been a time of gradual decay, a time when the pulses of the nation beat feebly and faintly, but when they might still be felt; a time after that when you knew it had ceased to breathe, but when you could still speak of it as entire. But another stage had come, the stage of utter dissolution, when each limb looked as if it had nothing to do with any other, when you could scarcely force yourself to believe that they had ever been joined together. Can these bones live? what a thought to come into the mind of any man gazing on such a scene! It could not have come from himself certainly, nor from any of these relics. God must have sent it to him; He must have led him to dream that such a resurrection was possible. And now the process of it is also revealed to him. The prophet is commanded to speak. His speech seems a mere sound in the air. But there is a noise and a shaking; then a frightful movement of the bones towards each other, each claiming its fellow to which it had once belonged. The strange effort at a union of dead things betokens a power that has not yet declared itself. And soon the sinews and the flesh came up upon them. They have acquired a form, though they have no life. "Then said He unto me, 'Prophesy unto the wind, Thus saith the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.' So I prophesied as He commanded. And the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

"Doth he not speak parables?" was the phrase by which the Jews of the captivity expressed their dislike and contempt for the troublesome and mystical prophet who was among them. "Doth he not speak parables?" is a question which men, looking round with weary hearts upon the condition of Christ's Church in various periods of its existence, have asked themselves, with a very different intention and spirit, when they have read this vision of the valley of dry bones. "Is not this written," they have said, "for the ages to come? Is not this one of the parables concerning the kingdom of God?" Yes, brethren, if we will first read it fairly and honestly, as describing what Ezekiel says it described to him, — if we will not search for a distant application till we have acknowledged the immediate one, — we shall find that here, as everywhere, Ezekiel is exhibiting facts which belong to other times as well as his own, and laws and a method of Divine government which belong to all times as well as his own.

And that I may not waste your time in enumerating different crises of history in which the facts may be discerned and by which the law and the method may be tested, I say at once, they are all for us; the vision and the interpretation are of this day. Do you not hear men on all sides of you crying, "The Church which we read of in books exists only in them. Christendom consists of Romanists, Greeks, Protestants, divided from each other, disputing about questions to which nineteen twentieths of those who belong to their communions are indifferent. And meantime what is becoming of the countries in which these different confessions are established? What populations are growing up in them? Does the present generation believe that which its fathers believed? Will the next generation believe any thing?" Brethren, you hear such words as these spoken. I do not mean to inquire how much there is of truth in them, how much of exaggeration, what evidences there are on the other side which have been overlooked, what signs of life there are anywhere in the midst of apparent death. But this I must say; Christians in general are far too eager to urge special exceptions when they hear these charges preferred; far too ready to make out a case for themselves while they admit their application to others; far too ready to think that the cause of God is interested in the suppression of facts. The prophets should have taught us a different lesson. They should have led us to feel that it was a solemn duty, not to conceal, but to bring forward all the evidence which proves, not that one country is better than another, or one portion of the Church better than another, but that there is a principle of decay, a tendency to apostasy, in all, and that no comfort can come from merely balancing symptoms of good here against symptoms of evil there, no comfort from considering whether we are a little less contentious, a little less idolatrous, than our neighbors. Alas for this church or for any church, if its existence now, if its prospects for the future, are to be determined by such calculations as these! No, brethren, our hope has a deeper foundation. It is this; that when the bones have become most dry, when they are lying most scattered and separate from each other, there is still a word going forth, if not through the lips of any prophet on this earth, then through the lips of those who have left it, — yet not proceeding from them, but from Him who liveth for ever, — the voice which says, "These bones shall rise." It is this; that every shaking among the bones, every thing which seems at first a sign of terror, — men leaving the churches in which they have been born, forsaking all the affections and sympathies and traditions of their childhood, — infidel questionings, doubts whether the world is left to itself or whether it is governed by an evil spirit, — are themselves not indeed signs of life, but at least movements in the midst of death which are better than the silence of the charnel-house, which foretell the approach of that which they cannot produce. It is this; that all struggles after union, though they may be of the most abortive kind, though they may produce fresh sects and fresh divisions, though they must do so as long as they rest on the notion that unity is something visible and material, yet indicate a deep and divine necessity which men could not be conscious of in their dreams if they were not beginning to awake. It is this; that there are other visions true for us, as they were for Ezekiel, besides the vision of dry bones. The name of a Father has not ceased to be a true name because baptized men do not own themselves as His children. The name of a Son has not ceased to be a true name because men are setting up some earthly ruler in place of Him, or are thinking that they can realize a human fellowship without confessing a Man on the throne above the firmament. The name of the Spirit has not ceased to be a true name because we are thinking that we can form combinations and sects and churches without His quickening presence, because we deny that He is really in the midst of us. It is this; that when all earthly priests have been banished or have lost their faith, though there should be none to mourn over the ruins of Jerusalem, or to feel its sins as his own, yet that there is a High-Priest, the great Sin-Bearer, ever presenting His perfect and accepted sacrifice within the veil, a High-Priest not of a nation, but of humanity. It is this; that though all earthly temples, in which God has been pleased to dwell, should become desecrated and abominable, though all foul worship should go on in the midst of them, and though what is portrayed on their walls should too faithfully represent what is passing in the more secret chambers of imagery, though at last the shrines that have been supposed to contain the mystery which they set forth should be utterly destroyed, and a voice should be heard out of the midst of them, saying, "Let us depart," — yet that this will not be the sign that the Church of God has perished, only the sign that the temple of God has been opened in heaven, and that from thence must come forth the glory that is to fill the whole earth.

SERMON XXVII.

THE NEW TEMPLE.

Lincoln's Inn, 2d Sunday after Trinity.—June 20, 1852.

Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities: and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the laws thereof: and write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them.—Ezekiel xliii. 10, 11.

The later visions in the book of Ezekiel relate to a Temple, the form and proportions of which are very minutely described. What is this Temple? The first obvious suggestion is that Ezekiel was looking forward to the times of Ezra; that this Temple is an anticipation of that of which Zerubbabel brought forth the headstone. But the building which rises before the eyes of the seer covers an area which the second Temple never can have occupied. The scale of it appears to exceed that of Solomon's, which struck the old man, who had seen it or heard of it from his father, as so much grander than its successor. In Ezekiel's vision, moreover, there is a distinct allusion to that appearance of the glory of the Lord which belonged, the Jews say, exclusively to the elder building. Christian writers have availed themselves of these circumstances to decide peremptorily that the vision is of a spiritual, not an earthly, Temple. The difficulties in the way of such an opinion are very great. Accurate admeasurements in feet and cubits seem as if they must relate to a visible, not to an invisible, fabric. There are still two possible opinions. One is popular among many of our countrymen. It is that a Temple exactly answering to Ezekiel's description will appear hereafter in Jerusalem. The other you will at once identify as foreign. It is that of a critic of great learning and acuteness, often of much sympathy with the earnest patriotism of the prophets. He thinks that Ezekiel carried with him into Chaldea the habits, prejudices, and formality of the priestly order to which he belonged. Therefore, though he had high moral purposes and divine instincts, he could not but regard the reappearance of a Temple like that which Nebuzaradan had destroyed, only more magnificent, as the consummation of an Israelite's dreams and hopes. The critic connects this explanation of the later chapters of the book with a theory respecting the whole of it. Ezekiel is, in his judgment, more of an artist than a prophet. The elder prophets, he thinks, delivered their discourses before the people; the son of Buzi, for the most part, composed his in his chamber. The book therefore, he supposes, while it wants freshness, has a unity of purpose which we do not find elsewhere. The Temple, in which the early years of the seer were passed, gives it a beginning, a middle, and an end.

I shall not seek to get rid of this last explanation by calling it the irreverent offspring of a modern or a foreign school. The criticism, which was fashionable among the most approved interpreters of our Church in the last century, leaves me no excuse for such language. They seem to have thought that — not one, but — all the prophets were busy, in the most solemn moments of their own lives and of their country's history, in selecting ingenious and striking epithets and in developing their thoughts with a grotesque Oriental imagery. I believe the more recent commentator would shrink from such language. He would admit that the prophets were, one and all, deep-minded, reasonable men; and that is one step towards the belief that they were really inspired by God. Nor would it hinder any one, I should think, in his progress towards that conviction, to suppose that, as each prophet exhibits a different character, temperament, and style — the signs of a distinct work, — so the one who was least called forth by sudden emergencies, who was not in the midst of the fears and hopes of a siege or of an invasion, should have contemplated events less as detached, more in a series, than his predecessors. Least of all would it detract from the probability of a divine education, to suppose that the holy function of the priest had given a color — as I maintained last week that it did — to all Ezekiel's thoughts, and that in it we may discover the key to their order and connection.

But on the other hand, I think, every thoughtful reader, whatever his notions about Inspiration may be, must admit, that, if there was any thing in Ezekiel's circumstances, or in the constitution of his mind, which disposed him to look upon the world as a student looks out upon it from his closet, no one had that tendency more repeatedly and painfully counteracted. Petty trials and the most serious trials, the eating of loathsome food, the death of his wife on the day on which he had spoken to the people, served alike to rob him of any lofty conceits, to bring him down to the level of the most unhappy of those with whom he was associated, to teach him that outward events were linked and fastened to the inmost fibres of his being. If the captivity withdrew him from some of those political relations in which he would have been involved at Jerusalem, it brought him into closer and more personal contact with the heartlessness and indifference, as well as with the secret idolatries, of his countrymen. His removal from the Temple and the temple-worship threw him, as I endeavored to show you, more as an outcast upon the wide and profane world, and compelled him to ask whether he was away from God, because he was away from the place that directly testified of Him. Instead of being more surrounded with the means and appliances which tempt a man into artificial faith, he was stripped more bare of them than any prophet had ever been. Whatever value he might have set upon the Temple in other days, whatever he might have set upon it then, he, more than any other man, had to learn that, if he had no better resting-place for his spirit than that, it must be dreary and homeless.

His earliest visions had taught him, that not only the Cherubim in the temple of Solomon, but that all Babylonian symbols, had a meaning; that they betokened a relation between the lower creatures and man, between man and God; that the most terrific powers of nature spoke of government and order and harmony. The later vision of the valley of the dry bones had taught him that no change in the outward condition of his countrymen could lift them from their degradation or make them a nation again, till a quickening and uniting spirit entered into them. That vision had also taught him that the spirit does not breathe upon the separate bones for the sake of raising them to a separate life, that when they stand up it must be as one body, as a great army, instinct with the same purpose, directed by the same head. If Ezekiel came into Mesopotamia with the prejudices of a caste about him, surely there never were lessons so divinely contrived as these to break down such prejudices. Whatever of formality, whatever of exclusiveness, clung to him in virtue of his birth or his profession, must have sustained shocks which the ridicule and unbelief of all the heathens round about could not have caused. He must have felt that God Himself was leading him through the strangest paths, in the most unfathomable depths, to feel after Him and find Him.

But then the question recurs, Why is it that the prophet, having in the commencement of his work been led into such awful visions of God, not as he stood in the holy place, but as he dwelt by the river of Chebar, — why is it that when he had had such tremendous visions of the corrupt and abominable worship which went on in the Temple while it was yet standing, such damning proofs that it had no charm to expel any horrible idolatry or moral infamy, — why is it that his latest and most brilliant hopes refer, as it would seem they do, to the reappearance of some fabric with material gates and walls, and that he should look in such a fabric for some conspicuous manifestation of the Divine glory? We cannot honestly shrink from this question. In striving to answer it for myself, I have found help from all those different and apparently contradictory suggestions of which I spoke. I do not believe that it is necessary to discard any of them; perhaps we may find some principle which reconciles them.

It would be inconsistent with the character of all the Jewish prophecies which we have considered, certainly not least inconsistent with the prophecies of Ezekiel, to suppose that he did not look forward to a reconstruction of Jewish society after a definite and comparatively short term of bondage. Unpromising as the elements around him were, dry as were the bones which lay scattered in the valley, he still believed that out of these a nation was to be formed, not a new nation, but one in which would survive the blessing of Abraham, the law of Moses, the covenant with David. To suppose the nation appearing again without a temple for its centre, would have been difficult to him before, was actually impossible to him now. While he served daily in the courts of the Lord's house, he may never have known, or deeply reflected, what its relation to the Commonwealth was. He went through his duties, he experienced the blessing of them; he probably contemplated the removal of the building as a perfectly incredible event. But the general law will have been good in his case. Till the gift was gone, its meaning will in great part have been hidden. When Ezekiel left the Temple, or when it was burnt, he will have known that that collection of goodly stones expressed the presence of a one living Being, that it denoted the unity of the tribes, that it spoke of a bond of fellowship for all nations, that it declared justice and order to be the foundation of all society. These discoveries, dawning upon him by degrees, — not looking at all like discoveries, but as undoubted commonplaces which he had admitted always, — will have compelled him to feel that, if his land should be again what God affirmed it was to be, the mountain of the Lord's house must be again the citadel of its strength, the common object of all eyes and hearts.

For a prophet to have these convictions in his mind, and not to expect an actual building to appear on an actual hill, would have been strange and contradictory. And as he was dealing with men who had often very lively hopes that they should recover their lands and their houses, who were told by their prophets that the captivity would terminate almost immediately, but who understood very little what was implied in the dissolution of a nation's existence, what was necessary to the restoration of it, the prophet had need to be very definite in his announcements respecting this new building. The people must understand clearly that, when he spoke of a temple, he meant a temple, — that and nothing else. Their minds were gross and material, but they were also loose and vague. They had a strong sense of what it was to be deprived of their olive-yards and their vineyards; the deprivation of freedom and of worship was altogether visionary and fantastic. It was unspeakably valuable that they should hear of "a man having a measuring reed in his hand, of six cubits long by the cubit, and a hand-breadth; of there being chambers of the gate eastward, three on this side and three on that; of the three being of one measure; of the posts having one measure on this side and on that." Apart from all significance that might attach to the forms of the building, this precision itself was an education for them. It gave them a sense of reality which they could not otherwise have had. The thing was actually to be. It was not a shadow or dream of an inventor of parables. It was to have a shape; ordinary earthly measures could be applied to it.

But where did the prophet get these measures? To what did they correspond? There cannot be the slightest doubt, I conceive, that the general form and construction of the building, the different parts of which it was to consist, the cherubim and palm-trees which were to adorn it, were suggested to him by that which he had actually seen; that the house which had been dear to him above all others, in which he had grown up, in which he had presented the sacrifice, was the hint and type to him of any new one which might be raised up in its place. It would be quite contrary to the analogy of prophecy to think otherwise. Only the enchanter or magician pretends to behold in the future that which has nothing answering to it in the present or the past. The true prophet affects no such gift,—rather, vehemently disclaims it. He is a witness for Him who is and was and is to come. If he taught that the future were to be unlike the past, that there was no common root out of which they both grew, he would be faithless to his vocation, he would be forgetting the permanent and eternal Being. Solomon's temple had been Ezekiel's primer or first lesson-book; he was not to forget the learning which he had received from it, when other learning was added to it.

Neither was he to forget that other learning. Since he had been brought to the river of Chebar, he had been instructed in the witness which God had borne of Himself in the outward world, even in the forms which had been turned to idolatrous uses. He had seen how near the false lies to the true, what need there is that the truth should be recognized in its length and breadth that the falsehood may be cast out, what need there is that even the outward expressions of a truth should be recognized in order that they may not be made into instruments of division, that they may not be turned against Him who has created them, but may be the manifestation of some aspect of His own nature. What, therefore, we discern in Ezekiel's vision of a temple, however imperfectly we may be able to follow out its different details, is the anticipation of one which should express, far more completely and expansively than the temple of Solomon had done, all which that temple had been designed to express, which should declare in the fullest sense the Divine unity upon which Ezekiel had been led to meditate, which should embody the union and reconciliation of the tribes broken by the revolt of Israel and the pride of Judah, and which should be at the same time what Solomon had certainly once supposed that his might be, a house of worship for all nations, a gathering up of that which was dispersed and fragmentary in their different national forms and symbols.

Now it is quite evident that the second temple which was built by Zerubbabel did not correspond to this idea. There were good reasons why it should not, reasons which, on some future occasion, I may have to consider at large. I speak now only of the fact. It was not a house even for the twelve tribes, still less was it a house for all nations. The Jews, on their return to the land of their fathers, found themselves obliged to be more exclusive than their fathers had ever been. Genealogies were studied for the very purpose of resisting the attempt of any settlers of doubtful blood to work with them. Those priests who had married foreign women were even forced to dismiss their wives. A temple which was suitable to a people that began its new existence with these acts might realize the promise made to Ezekiel, that the dry bones should become a body again; it could not resemble the framework which he had seen in his vision. If the temples had exactly answered to each other, one of them must have been false to the principle which it sought to embody.

In using this language, I have anticipated what I have to say to those who maintain that Ezekiel is giving us the pattern of a temple made of living stones, not of stones hewn out of an earthly quarry. Let those who adopt this phraseology be sure first that they understand themselves; then there is hope that they will bring others to a good understanding with them. By a spiritual temple, they do not, I trust, mean an unsubstantial temple, one built of clouds and mists, one erected by the eye which sees it. They believe, doubtless, the spiritual temple to be a spiritual *society*, possessing a real unity, inhabited by the Divine presence, resting on the Divine Name. Well, I do not doubt that Ezekiel saw more or less clearly the pattern of such a society as this; I do not doubt that he was instructed to present this pattern in earthly forms. But we must remember first not to confound the pattern with the earthly forms which set it forth; secondly, we must assure ourselves that whatever is spiritual and substantial will seek to find some expression for itself, to make the things of earth into mirrors which may reflect at least a portion of its glory. It is not a proof that Ezekiel carried about with him the narrowness and formality of a priest, that he longed to see an outward temple, like the one in which he had ministered, but larger, freer, nobler. It is not a proof that he carried about with him the narrowness and formality of a priest, that he believed there would be such a building, and that he was able to study and represent its parts and proportions. It is a proof that he had received the true education of a priest, that the law of his fathers had not been a dead letter to him, that he had entered into the purpose of God when he said, "In this place will I dwell, for I have a delight therein." It is a proof that he had got beyond the walls and entered into that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart conceived, that he supposed the hard and stubborn materials which earth supplies may discourse of "Him who dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped by men's hands as though He needed any thing."

I believe that all the prophet's previous visions would have been maimed and comparatively unreal, if they had wanted this climax. And I say so for this reason. The once wealthy captives by the river Chebar were desiring to restore a society in which they should have the full swing of their tastes and appetites, and plenty of slaves to minister to them. And the false priests and the false prophets were ready enough to encourage this opinion. *They* would have the fat of their sacrifices, they would have their obedient troop of female devotees to help them to hunt souls. All should come back again just as it was before; the same vanity, insolence, falsehood, devilry. That would be their mode of reviving a divine society. But Ezekiel tells them it shall not be so at all. "Thus saith the Lord God," (these words occur in the very midst of the ordinances respecting the new building,) "the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by possession, to thrust them out of their possession. But he shall give his sons inheritance out of *his own* possession, that my people be not scattered every one from his possession." Here was a great moral and political law, which was a necessary and natural corollary from the doctrine that the temple was to be the building which denoted the restoration of the national society. This is a law which those who merely talk of a spiritual temple without believing that that temple is to make its influence felt in *this* world, would never dream of promulgating. This is a law which it was most strictly in the function of a Jewish prophet to assert, not as proceeding from him, not even as proceeding from Moses, but as coming from the mouth of the Lord.

This last remark may enable us to understand the words of my text. "Thou Son of Man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure the pattern.

And if they be ashamed of all their iniquities, show them the form of the house." I cannot wish for a better commentary than this upon the question we have just been considering, nor a more complete answer to the question which remains to be considered. The Israelites of the captivity might see the pattern when they had repented of their iniquities; till then it was impossible. The idea of a spiritual society could not unfold itself to them while they were living in a heartless, divided, self-righteous state. They must be humbled before they could feel the possibility of such a society; still more before they could confess it to be real. The hindrance to the discernment of it was not an intellectual one; it was not that they wanted the intuition and the foresight of the prophet; it was wholly moral. It was their baseness and selfishness which made their eyes dim that they could not see, and their ears heavy that they could not hear. It was so then; it was so in every generation afterwards. "Repent," said John the Baptist, "for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." The pattern of the house is about to be presented to you. The spiritual society, of which your temple contained the imperfect outward embodiment, is going to be manifested. The Head of it is among you. But you cannot see it, you cannot see Him. Repent, turn round to God, that He may remove the film from your eyes and enable you to receive the revelation which He is making to you. The same language goes through the Gospels. "Except ye are converted and become as little children," said our Lord to His disciples, "ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot see the Kingdom of God," He said to the ruler of the Jews. "Repent," said St. Peter on the day of Pentecost, "and be baptized, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to as many as the Lord your God shall call." All these words stand in direct connection with the discovery or manifestation of a divine and spiritual communion. All the blindness which is ascribed to the Jewish nation is mainly this, that they would not accept it as the manifestation of a kingdom for human beings, of a society grounded upon the Name of the Son of God and the Son of Man; that they would have only a Jewish society. And that Jewish society proved itself not to be Jewish, but a miserable collection of sects, hating each other and contrary to all men, not claiming to be children of God and therefore not able to assert their title as children of Abraham; essentially inhuman, and therefore necessarily given up to the worship of a false God, — of Mammon instead of Jehovah.

Ezekiel was to show his countrymen the form of the house, when a confession of their iniquities should enable them to discern the pattern after which it was to be built. The law must hold good for all times to come. There may be such a house yet built in Jerusalem. God grant that there may! But it must be built by a people who are capable of giving the outward expression to an inward truth which is possessing them; who have humbled themselves in dust and ashes before God for their selfishness, their exclusiveness, their worship of gold; who have confessed the Cross to be the highest manifestation of the wisdom and power of God; who have rejoiced in that manifestation because it is universal, because the Christ hath said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me"; who have perceived that the Divine Unity is not a narrow, selfish individuality, but the unity of a Father with a Son in one Spirit. Jews possessed with these convictions may be destined in some very wonderful manner to instruct all nations in them, not by letters only and speech, but by polity and art, by a restored city of which the Son of David is the acknowledged king, by a restored temple which He will again claim as His Father's house, and will not suffer to be a house of merchandise.

But these considerations, brethren, must have respect to all nations as well as to this one; they bear upon the whole history of Christendom. Some time after the Gospel of a Kingdom of Heaven had been preached in all parts of the Roman Empire, and the old temple that stood on the hill over Jerusalem had perished, there began to be a feeling that every portion of human life, the forms of society, the roughest stone, the richest marble, as well as the thoughts and feelings which had fashioned them into shape and symmetry, must be devoted to the expression of that truth which had come to restore and regenerate the universe. The task was commenced and went on bravely. The old temples, that had been constructed for the service of divided and local gods, were pressed into the service of the One God. Every form and symbol, it was rightly believed, which belonged to the old world, might be claimed as the spoil and the heritage of that which had succeeded it. The sense of the infinite and unfathomable which such edifices could scarcely awaken, found out a new kind of temple in which the worshipper could lose himself, and confess a presence real, personal, incomprehensible. But one and another form, that which delighted the Southern worshipper, that which kindled without satisfying the Northern, could as little resist the idolatrous tendencies of the heart as Solomon's temple had done. All have been degraded into means of feeding the sensual and earth-born tastes which they boasted that they were able to subdue or to sanctify. Then the notion grew up, that there was something close and stifling in the atmosphere of such temples; that art was a dangerous ally of devotion; that the most homely building was the one which He who promised to dwell with the humble and contrite was the most likely to inhabit; that the upright heart and pure is, after all, the only true temple. Promising words! — pointing to high truths, just as the tower or steeple pointed to them; but just as little able, as they were, to reach the truths or to preserve them. Hardness, exclusiveness, self-conceit, self-worship, in a thousand forms, it was found, could hide itself in language which seemed to the utterers of it the protest against every possible falsehood, the sure protection of simplicity and humility. And the principle which was so loudly proclaimed was not carried out. Heaven was to be divorced from earth. But the worst habits of earth — the habits of the money-changer — introduced themselves into the sanctuary. Religious men, as if to revenge that invasion, pretended to make capture of Science and Art, and to force them into the service of Christianity. In fact, they only made both dishonest. There was no divorce; there could be none; only earth could become fantastical and heaven material, in the struggle to effect one. The experience of such consequences from the Puritan doctrine and practice has produced, in our day, a vehement reaction in favor of all sensuous helps to devotion. It has been resisted as vehemently. Was not the movement justifiable, when it seemed as if God's beautiful universe were to be given up to the Devil as his rightful possession? Was not the opposition to it justifiable, when the plea put forth for buildings, pictures, music, was, that the heart and spirit of human beings cannot converse with the invisible except through the visible?

Each doctrine is equally unscriptural, equally subversive of Christ's redemption, equally fatal, as the experience of three centuries has proved, to inward morality, as well as to the morality of common life. Each shows that the eyes of the members of the Christian Church — whether they are dazzled with the splendor of an external hierarchy, or have become dim from poring over mere letters, or are blinded by introversion — have lost the capacity of beholding that heavenly pattern, which every building on this earth must strive, in its measure and according to its purpose, to embody. While that is hidden from us, we may talk of the symbols and styles of architecture, we may mimic our fathers, we may try to invent something of our own; the new as little as the old will express the communion of spiritual creatures with their Father and with each other. The remedy in this case, as in all cases, lies not in new theories or more acute criticism, in greater servility to old models or a more scornful independence of them, but in an earnest repentance. When we are ashamed of our strifes, of our indifference, of our vainglory, of our money-worship, when we have asked God to put these away from us, to give us true hearts, and to write His name and the name of the Holy City upon us; we shall understand how our fathers saw some letters of that name in every part of the universe; we shall admire the diligence and delight with which they strove to decipher the hieroglyphics; we shall study their methods and profit by their discoveries. But we shall believe, not because of their word, but because we have seen for ourselves; because we have the Kingdom of God within us; because we have Christ Himself to interpret the parables of it, — Christ Himself to give us the power of proclaiming it to all nations, that they may walk in the Light of it. Then we shall find that the brass, the stone, the iron, and the gold are stubborn materials only because we have allowed them to be tyrannical masters; that we can subdue the powers and properties of nature when we claim them for Him who gave Himself up to be the lowest of all; and who is therefore exalted above all.

THE END.

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